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LONGMAN'S MAGAZINE

JULY 1901.

*Fyander's Widow.*¹

BY M. E. FRANCIS (MRS. FRANCIS BLUNDELL),

AUTHOR OF 'YEOMAN FLEETWOOD,' 'THE DUENNA OF A GENIUS,'
'IN A NORTH-COUNTRY VILLAGE,' 'MISS ERIN,'
'A DAUGHTER OF THE SOIL,' &c.

PART II.—THE PRINCE.

CHAPTER IX.

L'absence est à l'amour
Ce qu'est au feu le vent ;
Il éteint le petit,
Mais il allume le grand.

SEVERAL days passed, and Richard made no sign. Rosalie went about looking like the ghost of herself. It was known that she was suffering from a very severe attack of neuralgia, which, oddly enough, had first seized her on the very day of Richard Marshall's sudden departure.

Some guileless people believed in the neuralgia—poor Mrs. Fyander did look so very bad, and a body couldn't make believe to be so pale. Others, among whom was Mrs. Belbin, folded their arms and assumed a knowing air. 'Twas likely enough, averred this matron, for folks to look pale as had reason to. Mrs. Fyander's conscience was very likely a-troublin' o' she. She was a terrible one for carryin' on wi' young men—a-leadin' of them on, and then a-sendin' them off wi'out no reason. Her Sam

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could say somethin' if he'd a mind—her Sam did know more than he did like to talk about. Others, again, were of opinion that Mrs. Fyander was just wasting away for love of Mr. Sharpe's nephew, and that that young man had gone of his own accord, and had not been dismissed by the widow. 'Twasn't very likely, said these sages, that Richard Marshall, who had his own way to make in the world, and who was known to have great expectations from his uncle, would wish to have any unpleasantness with him. In response to the suggestion that the young man wouldn't be a-doin' so very bad for hisself if he and Widow Fyander made a match of it, they declared conclusively that it was quite unpossible for him and Widow Fyander to make a match of it, since her banns were to be given out almost immediately with Farmer Sharpe. Somebody had up and axed Mrs. Fyander when the wedding was to be, and she had answered that the day was not yet fixed, but that the wedding was to take place as agreed at the end of July.

Isaac heard none of these rumours, but he too wandered about with an unusually lengthy and gloomy face.

One day, however, Rosalie, looking out from the darkened room where she was sitting, saw him hastening towards her house with every appearance of excitement, waving a piece of paper in his hand.

In a moment she stood on the threshold.

'You have heard from Richard?' she cried eagerly. 'You have had a letter?'

'Nay, my dear, I haven't had no letter,' panted Isaac, as soon as he was near enough. 'I've had a graft.'

'You have had what?' inquired Rosalie.

'I have had a graft, my dear, a tele-graft—in one of them nasty-lookin' yeller wrappers as al'ays seems to bring bad news.'

'I hope it hasn't brought bad news this time,' said she tremulously, as they went into the house together.

'Nay, I hope not,' said the farmer doubtfully. 'It doesn't say much, d'ye see—not much one way or t'other.'

Smoothing out the paper, he handed it to her upside down.

Rosalie reversed it, and read the brief message:

'Send luggage as soon as possible Lime Street Station, Liverpool, to be called for.—Richard.'

'Liverpool! Then he must intend to go to America again!'

Isaac flushed, and his jaw dropped.

'Now, Mrs. F., I do call that a-jumpin' to conclusions,' he said presently, quite testily for him. 'You haven't no earthly reason for sayin' sich a thing. Is it likely my nevvy 'ud go off to 'Merica

again when he's only just a-comed back? Didn't he say he was a-longin' and a-longin' to be back to the old country——'

'I know,' interrupted Rosalie quickly; 'but for all that I'm sure he means to return to America now. He told me he landed at Liverpool, and, depend upon it, he intends to start from there again. Yes, yes, I'm quite sure of it. He did not rest, you see, until he had put the length of the country between us, and now he means to go further still—perhaps when he is at the other side of the world he will be contented.'

She spoke with irrepressible bitterness, but Isaac did not notice it.

'If that's your opinion, Mrs. F.,' he said, 'we'd best lose no time in carryin' out my little plan. I've got a plan, d'ye see,' he added, with modest triumph. 'Ah, it comed to me all of a sudden. We'll write to him, Mrs. F.'

'But what would be the use of writing?' said Rosalie. 'We cannot force him to come back against his will.'

'Nay, we can't force him, but I think 'tis only some notion the chap's got in his head. He seemed quite settled till last week, and maybe the rovin' fit will ha' wore off a bit by now. He's gone all the way to Liverpool, d'ye see—that ought to ha' let off a bit o' steam. Maybe, if we wrote him a letter and just axed him straight out, he might change his mind. We can send a letter with his luggage—twon't be too late so long as he hasn't left the country; and he can't leave the country wi'out his luggage, d'ye see? We can but try.'

'Of course—you can try,' said Rosalie, pressing her hand to her head with a bewildered air.

'So, I were thinkin', Mrs. F., if ye'd jist set down and drop a line to 'em for me—that's to say, if your head bain't a-troublin' you too much——'

He was looking at her pleadingly, misunderstanding the expression of her face.

'Oh, never mind about my head. I'm only wondering—I'm only thinking. Must the letter go to-day?'

'Well, ye see, Richard did ax most perticular for his traps to be sent off *at once*,' replied the farmer, his eyes round with anxiety; 'and if we don't send the letter at the same time we mid miss him.'

'Bithey used always to write to him for you, didn't she?' said Rosalie, catching at the last straw. 'Perhaps it would have more effect if she wrote.'

'Nay now, my dear, if ye'd be so obligin', I'd take it very kind o' you to do it. It d' take Bithey very near three days to write a letter—I'd be very much obliged to 'ee, my dear,' he repeated persuasively.

Thus adjured she had no resource but to comply, and with a beating heart and throbbing brain she set about her preparations. Going to the window, she drew up the blind a little way, and then, collecting pen, ink, and paper, sat down opposite Isaac at the table. When she had thus inaugurated proceedings Isaac might have been observed to gather himself up, concentrating, as it were, all his forces in preparation for the effort of composition.

Having dipped her pen in the ink, Rosalie looked inquiringly at him.

'How do you wish me to begin?' she said.

'Bithey do al'ays start off wi "My dear Nevvy,"' responded Isaac in a husky tone, as though he were speaking from beneath a blanket, which evidently resulted from the mighty constraint he was putting upon himself.

'*My dear Nephew*,' wrote Rosalie, and then she raised her eyes again.

The farmer cleared his throat, drew a long breath, and continued slowly, and with apparently immense difficulty:

'*Your Uncle Isaac do say*—'

'Say,' repeated Rosalie, when she had written the last word.

Isaac, crimson in the face, was absorbed in the mental struggle, but presently perceived with a start that her pen had stopped moving.

'Have 'ee got *Say*? Well, *Your uncle Isaac do say*—as *I hope you'll change your mind*—'

'Hadn't I better put *he* hopes?' said the secretary.

The farmer came out of his brown study, and looked up at her inquiringly:

'Who's he?'

'Why you, of course. If I say, "Your uncle Isaac," I ought to go on in the same way, "He says." If I say "I" it will look as if I were speaking of myself—as if it were *I* who wished he would change his mind.'

'Well, and don't 'ee wish it?' asked Isaac sharply, but reproachfully too.

Rosalie bent her head over the paper, and answered hurriedly:

'I? Oh, of course, of course; but it would not do for me to tell him so—it would be too much of a liberty.'

'Lard, no, my dear. Richard wouldn't think it such. But there, I be dathered with so much talk—you mustn't cut in again, Mrs. F.—'tis terrible hard work writin' letters, and if ye go for to speak to I in the middle I'll be all mixed up. Let me tell 'ee my own way, d'y'e see?—Richard knows my ways, and he'll understand fast enough. Now, let me see:—"Your uncle Isaac wishes for to say as I hope y'e'll change your mind and come back. Mrs. F. is a-writin' this for I, and she wishes for to say 'tis Uncle Isaac as wants 'ee back"—that'll make it all right, d'y'e see?' he continued, dropping the high unnatural tone which seemed essential to dictation, and adopting a confidential one—"now he can't go for to make no mistakes. Have"ee wrote that?"

'No.—Oh, don't make me write that, Mr. Sharpe—I don't want him to think me unkind.'

Isaac clicked his tongue in desperation.

'Lard ha' mercy!' he ejaculated, 'this here letter 'ull never get wrote. Now, my dear, jist put down what I d' tell 'ee—and don't flurry me. When I do get flurried I can't for the life o' me think o' nothin'. Jist be a-puttin' o' that down, and I'll go on thinkin', d'y'e see. It'll come right—ye'll find it'll come right.'

Rosalie reluctantly set down the required sentence, and found at its conclusion that Isaac had already inflated himself in preparation for a further effort.

'Mrs. F. d' wish 'ee to come back too, as is nat'r'al, but she thinks it more becomin' not to say so.'

He fixed his eyes sternly upon her as he enunciated this statement, and in sheer desperation Rosalie set it down.

'Now ye haven't nothing to complain of, I don't think,' he remarked triumphantly. 'Now we can get on. Well—what next?'

After deep reflection the following words came forth:

'Tis most inconvenient for 'ee to be a-leavin' me at such short notice. I—wish—'ee—most—pertic'lar—to—come—back—to—week. We be a-goin' to cut the church meadow, and every hand be wanted. I do feel a bit hurt in my feelin's'—here Isaac paused to brush his coat sleeve across his eyes, and continued brokenly—"hurt in my feelin's to think as you have a-left your old uncle like that. 'Twarn't well done o' him,' he muttered, parenthetically, 'nay, I can't say as it were well done o' Richard.'

He wiped his eyes again, sniffed, drew an immense breath, and started off afresh :

'Like that. I do think ye mid ha' said a word, but I will not find fault no more, but jist ax ye to come straight back—an all will be forgive and forgot. Now I think, Mrs. F., we mid finish, ye mid jist write my name and I'll put my mark to it.'

He heaved a deep sigh of relief, wiped his brow, and sat gazing at her as she appended his signature to the page.

'That be my name, be it ?' he inquired. 'It do look very pretty wrote out so nice and small. 'Ees, I can see as this here's my name. *I—S—A—*. You put *A* twice, Mrs. F.'

'Yes, it should be written twice.'

'Ah !' said the farmer, gazing at the page doubtfully. 'Bithey now do only put it once—it be a matter o' taste, I suppose. Well, now, I'll put my mark.'

He ground his pen slowly into the paper, horizontally and perpendicularly, and remained gazing at it with a certain modest pride.

'There, shut 'en up now, and write his name outside.'

Rosalie obeyed, and held out the document towards Isaac, but as he was about to take it she drew it back, a deep flush overspreading her face. After a moment's hesitation, however, she again tendered it to him.

'There—take it,' she said, with a note of sharpness in her voice which would have struck a more acute observer than Isaac; but he duly pocketed it without noticing that anything was amiss.

Left to herself she sat for a moment or two in deep thought, her chin propped upon her hands; then suddenly rising, rushed out into the yard.

'Mr. Sharpe !' she called. 'Isaac !'

But the farmer's broad back was already vanishing down the lane. Evidently her voice failed to reach him, as he did not turn his head. Rosalie stood looking after him, without making further attempts to attract his attention, and then slowly returned to the house. Why should she call him back, after all —what need was there for her thus to disturb herself? Could she help writing the letter exactly as he wished? And how foolish were the qualms of conscience which the remembrance of certain phrases in it evoked! It was his letter, not hers: it was he who had insisted on stating that she wished Richard to return—she had never authorised him to do so. If Richard did come back she could not be blamed for it. If he did come back!

Again supporting her throbbing head with her hands, she tried to reason with herself, but the turmoil in heart and brain for a time forbade any consecutive train of ideas. During the long blank days which had passed since Richard's departure, and often in the course of the weary restless nights, this thought had constantly recurred to her with a never-failing stab :—*He has gone—he will never come back!*

And now, if he did come back—if he came back even for a little while ! If she might just see him again, if it were only to be once or twice ! At the mere suggestion she was conscious of a lifting of the load which had been crushing her. If he were made to know, through no fault of hers but rather against her will, that she did wish him to return—she who had let him go forth without a word to stay him—if he even guessed that she longed to see him—oh, it would be sweet to think he knew, that he would henceforth judge her less harshly, that he would realise how hard had been her struggle !

She raised her head, her lips parted in a smile, her eyes dreamily gazing at the strip of sunlit green outside her window. There he had stood ; thence he had turned away so mournfully, and now he was to come back. *To come back !* Would he not read between the lines of the oddly composed missive—would not the very words have for him a deeper meaning than their guileless originator guessed at—would he not come flying to her side ? In a few days—in little more than a few hours, perhaps, he would be with her ; and then !

She gave a sudden gasp, and flung herself forward across the table. And then ! In a moment the web of self-deception with which she had been endeavouring to cloak the situation was torn to shreds, and she saw the truth. A crisis was impending : it was folly to pretend that it would take her unawares, it was worse than folly to endeavour to shift the responsibility to poor unsuspecting Isaac. If Richard returned the struggle would have to be gone through again : it would be even harder than before, for she would have lured him back after he had broken from her. If thus sorely tempted and wrongfully encouraged he were to speak those words which she had seen so often trembling on his lips, what answer could she make ? Could she look him in the face and affect unconsciousness, or—what did she mean to do ? Did she mean to keep her plighted troth as an honest woman should, or did she mean to cast aside, for good and all, truth, and honour, and self-respect, and jilt the man who had been her faithful friend ?

'I want to do right,' said Rosalie, with another gasping-sigh.
'I have never told a lie in my life; I won't tell one now; I won't act one either. If he comes back it will only be on false pretences; he mustn't be allowed to come back.'

She lay still for a moment, her arms extended, a kind of tremor passing every now and then over her frame. Presently she said again, half aloud :

'I won't be deceitful; I won't break my word; but oh, how hard it is to do right! God help me!'

She straightened herself all at once, and pushed back the hair from her forehead; then, drawing the blotter towards her, wrote a hasty line on a sheet of paper—'Do not come back, I implore you. R. F.'—thrust it into an envelope, and directed it to Richard. With little convulsive sobs at intervals she went upstairs, bathed her swollen eyes, and put on her hat.

There was no one about the Down Farm when she approached it, but, on entering, she almost fell over a strapped portmanteau that had been placed just inside the doorway. As she recovered herself Bithey appeared at the kitchen door.

'I thought you was the carrier,' she remarked. 'Master did say as he'd sent for him to fetch that there box o' Richard Marshall's. 'Tis to go to Liverpool to-day.'

'Is Mr. Sharpe in?' asked Rosalie falteringly. Somehow the sight of that portmanteau made her turn suddenly faint.

'Nay, he bain't. But I'm expectin' him back every minute. He be gone some time now, and he said he'd just catch the carrier. I had a hard job to get all packed and ready, but 'tis done now.'

It was all packed, the straps fastened, the lock made secure. Rosalie was too late after all; the important postscript which was to supplement the letter could not, as she intended, be slipped among Richard's effects. Her heart gave a sudden throb that was not altogether of pain. She had honestly tried, but fate willed otherwise.

'I don't think I'll wait,' she stammered, scarcely knowing what she said. 'I shall see Mr. Sharpe to-morrow, and I should only be in your way. I dare say you are busy.'

'Nay, not that busy now, ma'am. I'm just a-makin' a parcel of a big thick coat o' Richard's. 'Twouldn't go in the box nohow, and I'm tryin' to pack it in paper, but 'tis that heavy it do slip out at one side so soon as I get t'other wrapped up.'

'Let me help you,' said Rosalie. 'Four hands are better than two.'

She had never seen Richard wear this coat, yet the mere sight of it—the mere consciousness that it was his caused a recurrence of that strange wave of faintness.

'We want a little bit more string, Bithey,' she said with the quaver in her voice which had been noticeable before.

'I think there's a little bit on the dresser shelf,' returned the old woman; and, dropping her end of the parcel, she went across the kitchen.

This was Rosalie's chance. She was white to the very lips, but she did not flinch. With cold trembling fingers she hid away the note in the breast-pocket of the coat; he would be sure to find it there.

Bithey discovered nothing, and presently, the packet being secured, Rosalie betook herself homewards.

'I've done it!' she said, pausing when she reached the solitude of the downs. 'Thank God! I've done it! It will be all right now.'

But it was not surprising that in the midst of her self-congratulations on having so successfully barred herself out of Eden she should once more melt into tears.

CHAPTER X.

Had we never loved sae kindly,
Had we never loved sae blindly,
Never met, or never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

BURNS.

THE cutting and making of Rosalie's hay had been proceeding briskly in the Church Meadow; the last swathes had fallen, and every available pair of hands had been called upon to assist in the work, for experienced weather-prophets had foretold gloomily that the actual 'fine spell' could not be expected to last.

Towards evening on the second day Farmer Sharpe stood alone in the centre of the field; mopped, for the hundredth time, his perspiring brow, and cast a contemplative look round.

'Twas past seven o'clock; the men had gone home some time before, but he had remained to take a final survey of the scene of their labours.

'I don't think it's so very like to rain,' remarked Isaac, looking

up at the sky, where, indeed, no trace of a cloud was to be seen. ‘Nay, I don’t hold wi’ Job—’twill keep up for a bit yet. Mrs. F. ‘ull ha’ gone home by now, I should think—she’d begin to find it a bit damp in the dell. The dew be falling very fast. Well, I’ll go home to my supper.’

He passed through the gate at the further end of the field, and had traversed more than half the distance which separated him from his home when the sound of heavy but rapid steps behind him made him halt and turn round.

Job Hunt, who had evidently been hastening in pursuit of him, paused too, his great red face wearing an appearance of unusual excitement, and his sly blue eyes positively goggling in his head. Owing to the unusual press of work, and the need for accomplishing it in a given time, Isaac had persuaded Rosalie to consent to his engaging this unwelcome addition to her forces, and she had agreed with a meekness that sufficiently indicated her spiritless condition. Job it was who had been most energetic in foretelling a coming storm, partly in order to render his services the more valuable, and partly because of a natural pleasure in predicting disaster to Mrs. Fyander’s crops.

‘Well!’ said Isaac, gazing at him in astonishment.

‘Have ‘ee seen what be goin’ on yonder, sir?’ was Job’s counter-query.

‘What be a-goin’ on where?’ inquired the farmer.

‘Why, there,’ returned Hunt, with a significant jerk of the thumb in the direction of the Church Meadow.

‘There bain’t nothin’ at all a-goin’ on there,’ returned his employer sternly. ‘I be just come from there—the field’s empty.’

‘Nay, Mr. Sharpe,’ returned Job, half closing one eye, and assuming a very knowing look. ‘Nay, it bain’t empty. Jist you step back and see. If you was to step up to the dell very cautious—I’d advise ‘ee to go very cautious, sir—you’d maybe see summat as ‘ud surprise ‘ee. Jist you come along wi’ I, Mr. Sharpe—I’ll show ‘ee where to look, and I d’ low ye’ll be astonished.’

Isaac surveyed him for half a minute or so without speaking, and then slowly jerked his thumb forwards.

‘Cut away,’ he said briefly. ‘Ees, I don’t mind if I do come, but I don’t expect to see nothin’ surprisin’ at all.’

Job grinned derisively for all rejoinder, and led the way as requested; walking with exaggerated caution, and turning his malevolent red-bearded face over his shoulder every now and

then to make sure that Isaac was following. The latter shambled along at his usual pace and with a perfectly imperturbable face.

As they drew near the dell, a small cup-shaped pit surrounded by bushes at the upper end of the field, the sound of voices was distinctly audible—two voices, a man's and a woman's—speaking, however, so low that even when Isaac and his companion were close to the brink they could distinguish no words.

'Jist step for'ard, Mr. Sharpe, sir,' whispered Job excitedly. 'Jist look down through the bushes; I'll bide here till ye come back.'

Sharpe paused for a moment or two, staring at him with evident displeasure, and then went forward. Presently his tall form towered above the bushes, and he looked down into the pit beneath.

After a long and steady gaze he returned to Job, took him by the shoulder, and propelled him to a safe distance from the tantalising spot. Job, when finally released, examined him with great curiosity; but the farmer's face, though a little redder than usual, in consequence probably of his recent exertions, was stolid as ever.

'Well?' he said in answer to the man's inquiring gaze.

'Well, sir, did 'ee see who was there?'

'Of course I did. Mrs. Fyander was there, where I left her, and my nevvy was there. He've comed home, I see, as I axed him.'

'Oh!' said Job, much disappointed, 'I didn't know you were expectin' of him.'

'Didn't 'ee, Job? I've been expectin' of 'en all this week. I'm glad he's come.'

'It seems a bit queer as he should be in Mrs. Fyander's hayfield, instead o' goin' straight to your place,' urged Job almost plaintively. It was a little disappointing to find that his great discovery had been anticipated. 'When I did see en bi-cycling along the road I made sure he must be going straight to you, and then when I did see his bi-cycle leanin' agen' the hedge, I jist thought I'd see where he'd got to—and there he were in the dell.'

'And a very nat'ral place for 'en to be,' returned Isaac in his most matter-of-fact tone. 'I did tell 'en most perticular we was cuttin' the Church Meadow, and when he saw Mrs. Fyander in the dell 'twas most nat'ral he should go and speak to her. I don't see nothin' queer, Job Hunt.'

'He was a-holdin' o' both her hands when I see 'en,' muttered Job.

'Ah!' commented Isaac. 'Well, he'll be a-holdin' both mine soon. I be main glad he be come back. Now I'm a-goin' home to my supper, and I think you'd do well to go back to yours, Job. I'll expect you early in the field to-morrow; so the sooner ye get back to look arter your own business the better. I wouldn't advise 'ee to go interfering wi' my nevvy. He bain't so very fond o' folks axin' questions or pryin' about. Ah, I've known 'en take his fists to a man once as he thought too curious. 'Tis the way wi' young chaps.'

He nodded, fixed his eyes impressively on Hunt, as though to make sure that the meaning of his words had penetrated to that somewhat dull-witted gentleman's consciousness, and finally rolled homewards, to all appearance placid as ever.

He had not proceeded very far before he paused, however, shook his head, and finally stood stock-still.

'Two hands,' said Farmer Sharpe, reflectively. 'Two hands!'

It now becomes necessary to ascertain what passed before Isaac Sharpe, looking down through the willow-bushes, descried Richard Marshall in such close proximity to Mrs. Fyander.

Nothing certainly was further from Rosalie's thoughts when she had taken refuge in that sheltered spot from the glare of the afternoon sun than the expectation of the advent of this companion. She had, in fact, quite decided that he was by this time out of the country, and had, indeed, made up her mind to erase his image definitely from her memory. Henceforward, as she frequently told herself, she must think only of Isaac—Isaac, who had always been her friend, who was so soon to be her husband. Her husband!—she must face the thought though she unconsciously shrank from it. Oh, would—would that this sweet cup of forbidden love had never been held to her lips! She had dashed it from her, but the taste of it remained and had taken all the savour out of her life. It had been to her a poisonous cup, containing as it did wine from the fruit of the tree of knowledge. '*You know very little of life,*' Richard had said to her once. Alas, alas! she knew now more than enough.

'O Elias—poor Elias,' she groaned to herself sometimes, 'why did you die? If you had lived I should have known nothing—I should have guessed at nothing. I might have gone

down to my grave without knowing that there was any other love than that which I gave you.'

As an antidote to the rebellious longing of which she was too often conscious, Rosalie had recourse to the panacea she had hitherto found unfailing in times of affliction—hard work. Since the writing of that letter to Richard and the subsequent battle with herself, she had resumed her old energetic habits. Once more she rose with the dawn, once more she passed hours in toil no less arduous than that allotted to her servants. She avoided solitude as much as possible, and strove by every means in her power to tire herself out.

So tired was she, indeed, on this particular afternoon, that, having sought the friendly shade of the grassy nook already referred to, she acknowledged herself to be incapable of further effort. Even when the great heat had somewhat abated, and the retreating voices and heavy tread of her labourers as they trooped homewards warned her that it was growing late, she sat on, her hands clasping her knees, her eyes gazing vacantly on the ground, too weary even to think.

A footstep sounded in the neighbourhood of her retreat, but she did not raise her eyes: it was some straggler, probably, hastening to rejoin the others. She could hear the bushes rustling, as though brushed by a passing form, and kept very still; she wanted nobody to speak to her, nobody even to look at her. But now the step faltered, halted—there was a pause; and then rapid feet began to descend towards where she sat. She raised her eyes, first in surprise and a little irritation, then in incredulous wonder, then—oh, what was it that Richard saw in them?

In a moment he was bending over her and both her hands were clasped in his.

Was it that particular moment that Job Hunt chose to pursue his investigations, or did the acknowledged lovers remain thus longer than they knew? Rosalie could never afterwards tell, nor could Richard. They felt as if they were in a dream; time, place, circumstances, were alike forgotten; a vague undefined bliss—the intangible bliss of dreams—haunted them both, and in the minds of both lurked the same dread of awakening.

It was Rosalie who was first recalled to life. Her eyes, which had been fixed on Richard's face, dropped gradually to his hands; gazed idly, first at those hands, then at her own which he was holding; then the idea gradually took shape in her mind—those

were her hands, Rosalie Fyander's hands, that were lying in Richard's clasp ; and they had no right to be there !

She snatched them away instantly, and the charm was broken.

' You have come back ! ' she cried. ' Why did you come back ? '

' I came,' said he, ' because I received your letter.'

Her face was white with anguish ; his, on the contrary, flushed, eager, triumphant.

' But did you not find the note which I put in your pocket ? ' she murmured, gazing at him with frightened eyes. ' I thought you would be sure to find it. The other was not—was not really mine. I had to write what he wanted.'

' I know,' he answered blithely. ' I could see it plainly enough. It was not that which brought me home. It was your own precious little note—the little line which laid bare your heart to me. I had already sailed before I found it, but we touched at Queenstown and I landed there and took the first boat home. I have travelled night and day since.'

She was shaking like a reed in the wind.

' But—I begged you not to come,' she whispered.

' You begged me not to come, sweet, and so I guessed, I knew—you betrayed your secret, my dear love, and I felt my own power.'

' No, no,' she gasped ; ' you must not speak to me like this, Richard—I will not listen. You know quite well that I cannot listen. I belong to another man ! '

But Richard bent nearer still, his face alight with the same inexplicable triumph—a triumph that was almost fierce.

' You belong to me,' he said ; and his words were perhaps the more passionate because spoken so low. ' You have belonged to me from the first. Even from the moment when I saw you in the picture I said to myself——'

' Oh, no,' pleaded Rosalie, in tones as passionate as his, but infinitely piteous. ' Do not say it, Richard—do not—do not put in into words ! '

Her hand flew out involuntarily as though to stop his mouth : he caught it and kissed it though it fluttered in his grasp.

' Why should I not say it—why should I not be brave enough to put into words the thought which has been in both our minds so often ? When I saw your picture I fancied myself standing beside you, bending over you——'

' Oh, hush, hush ! '

She had withdrawn her hand, and was covering her face.

'I said to myself,' he persevered, his words coming brokenly because of his quick breathing—'I said to myself, "If that woman lives she shall be my wife—I will search for her until I find her!" And then when I found you—I thought you were free.'

'But I was not free,' she interrupted, dropping her hands and looking up with eyes fierce and wild like those of a hunted animal. 'I am not free now, neither are you free. You are bound to him as much as I am—your duty stares you in the face—'

'It is too late to talk of duty! I ought never to have seen you. Do you suppose there is anything which you can tell me that I have not told myself a hundred times? He is my uncle—yes! He has been my benefactor always—more than a father to me—yes, yes! He is the kindest, the most warm-hearted, the most guileless of men. It would never enter his honest, innocent mind to suspect me of trying to supplant him; in acting as I do I am a traitor, a liar—vile, ungrateful, dishonourable, dishonest—oh, there are no words strong enough or black enough to paint me as I am! I know it and I agree to it; but I love you, Rosalie, and I will not give you up!'

Some of his words were scarcely audible as they came in gusts from his quivering lips; the veins on his forehead stood out; there was no mistaking the bitter contempt with which he stigmatised his own conduct, but there was even less possibility of misapprehending his deadly earnestness of purpose.

'I mean to have you,' he went on; 'I mean to let everything go—except you.'

She was so much taken aback at the suddenness of the onslaught, so confounded at the quickness with which he had fore stalled all she had intended to urge, that she stood before him for a moment absolutely mute; trembling, moreover, with the growing consciousness of her own weakness, and at his confident assumption of mastery over her.

Meanwhile he, with his eyes fixed upon her face, read it like a book. His own suddenly changed.

'It is useless to struggle, love,' he said, speaking very gently and tenderly. 'We have both done our best—we have tried to do right, but Fate has been too strong for us. We must just make up our minds to let ourselves go with the tide—and be happy.'

Rosalie was, as has been seen, very impressionable, very emotional—in a word, very womanly; but for all that there was at her heart's core the little kernel of strength which is to be found in the hearts of most good women—an instinctive sense of rectitude, the love of duty for duty's sake, even when the accomplishment of it involves great sacrifice. She looked Richard full in the face now.

'No,' she said; 'I will not take any happiness that has to be bought by doing wrong. I made my own choice and fixed my lot in life before I knew you, and now I will abide by it.'

The very severity of the struggle gave her courage, and Richard, all passion-swayed as he was, had in him a certain element of chivalrousness that responded to the effort she was making.

He was silent, and Rosalie, quick to perceive her advantage, went on eagerly:

'I ask you to leave me, Richard; I want you to go now. It is quite true that you have a kind of power over me, and that if you'—her voice faltered for a moment, but she steadied it—'if you go on urging me and persuading me you will very likely make me give in in the end; but I ask you, *because* you love me, not to do this. We could not be really happy if—if we came together through being dishonourable and ungrateful. It is better to do right at all costs. As for me, I mean to keep my word to your uncle. I will try my best to make him a good wife and to forget you.'

'And have you thought,' returned he, with a bitterness which he could not control—'have you thought at all of what is to become of me? The whole thing is absurd,' he went on with increasing irritation. 'Do you think for a moment that my uncle could suffer a tithe of what I shall suffer? You know very well he is not capable of it. Besides——' He broke off.

'I know what you mean,' said Rosalie, colouring faintly. 'He would not have thought of marrying me if I had not first suggested it. But I did suggest it, and he is very fond of me now.'

'Fond!' echoed the young man scornfully.

'Yes, as fond as it is in his nature to be. He has been faithful to me, and I will be faithful to him. I will do nothing that could pain or humiliate him. Some day you too will feel glad that you have not injured your benefactor.'

'Then what do you want me to do?' said Richard, still half

sullenly, though she saw by his face that her words had struck home.

'I want you to go away now—go quite away as you intended—as fast as you can—before—before anything happens to make us change our minds.'

In the words, in her pleading eyes, there was that same piteous confession of weakness which had before touched Richard, and which now roused afresh his most generous instincts.

'I will do what you wish,' he said. 'You are a good woman, Rosalie; I—will go.'

'To-night?'

'Yes; now!'

She glanced at him quickly, opened her mouth as if to speak, and then turned away without carrying out her intention.

Thus they parted, without another word or a clasp of the hands. Richard climbed up the bank and disappeared from view, and Rosalie remained standing where he had left her.

CHAPTER XI.



WHEN Richard emerged from the shadowy hollow where he had left his mistress standing as if turned to stone, he found all the land about him bathed with the rosy glow of sunset. The long 'rollers' of newly cut grass over which he stepped were touched here and there by arrows of light, and the twigs of the hedge towards which he made his way were outlined as by fire.

He saw none of these things, however; but when, climbing the low bank and passing through a gap in the hedge, he descended into the road, he was suddenly recalled to actualities by the unexpected appearance of a colossal figure which seemed to be mounting guard over his bicycle.

As Richard started back Farmer Sharpe rose from his seat on the bank, and stood square and determined before him, the ruddy

light playing upon his rugged face and shaggy hair and glorifying his white smock. One great hand still rested on the saddle of the bicycle, which it almost entirely covered. As Richard remained dumbly gazing at him, his fingers began to drum an impatient tune on its smooth surface.

The young man gazed desperately first at him and then at the bicycle, filled with an insane desire to possess himself of it and ride away at full speed. But whether because his courage failed him, or because nobler and more manly feelings gained the ascendancy over this momentary cowardice, he did not put the design into execution.

After gazing steadily at his nephew for what seemed an interminable time, Isaac removed his hand from the bicycle and pointed in the direction of the little dell.

'I seed 'ee there, Richard,' he remarked in a sepulchral tone. 'I seed 'ee there with Mrs. F.'

Richard braced himself, and looked him full in the face, but made no rejoinder.

'Ees,' said the farmer, 'I seed ye both; and I've been a-waiting here for ye, Richard.'

Still silence. Richard, indeed, felt that it would be useless to enter upon either explanation or apology.

Mr. Sharpe's hand crept back to the saddle and resumed its impatient tune; he planted his legs a little more widely apart, continuing the while to stare unwinkingly in his nephew's face.

When the tension had become almost unbearable, he spoke again.

'I thought I'd wait for 'ee here,' he said. 'I thought ye'd very likely have summat to say to me.'

The young man bit his lip and clenched his hands; he could scarcely brook the expectant look in those eyes.

'What am I to say, Uncle Isaac? I—what can I say? I'm going away at once.'

The combined effect of sunshine and emotion had already intensified the farmer's usually healthy colour, but this announcement caused it to deepen to a positively alarming extent. For a moment he seemed in danger of suffocation; he raised his hand mechanically to the loose collar of his smock and clutched at it; his eyes seemed ready to start from their sockets, and, though he opened his mouth and rolled his head from side to side as if about to fulminate against his nephew, no words came.

'Don't,' cried Richard, much alarmed—'don't be so angry,

uncle—you really needn't be so much upset. I tell you I'm going away at once—to-night.'

Farmer Sharpe sank down on the bank, sliding his legs out before him rigid as a pair of compasses; his head continued to roll threateningly, and his eyes to gaze fiercely at Richard, but it was some time before he could find voice.

'Ye can't go to-night,' he said at last, in husky suffocating tones: 'there bain't no train to-night.'

'Not from Branston, I know; but I mean to ride to Wimborne, and catch the night train there.'

Somehow this catching of the night train at Wimborne seemed to be the culminating point of Richard's depravity. Isaac positively groaned aloud; the fierceness went out of his eyes, and to Richard's infinite distress they filled with tears.

'What more can I do?' he faltered, torn with remorse and grief as he bent over him.

'I didn't think it of 'ee, Richard—nay, if anybody had told me ye'd go for to do such a thing I wouldn't ha' believed 'em. To go off wi'out a word to I—me as has been a father to 'ee—nay, not so much as a word!'

He paused, choked with emotion, and fell to wiping his eyes and shaking his head disconsolately; while Richard, slowly straightening himself, stood looking down at him.

'When Job Hunt did call me, and did p'int out as you was standin'—you and Mrs. F.—hand in hand: both hands in both hands,' he added, correcting himself, 'I didn't let on to take no notice. I did send Job about his business, and I did say to myself, "I'll wait," says I. "My nevvy 'ull tell me all about it jist now." And I did go and sit me down here. Says I, "I'll not interfere; I'll wait," I says; "Richard will out wi' it all to I—he'll act straight," I says. "He'll tell me."'

He spoke almost appealingly. Richard's face, which had turned from white to red, was now white again.

'I wanted to spare you, uncle,' he murmured at last, falteringly.

Isaac groaned, and shook his head; then drawing a long breath, and peering anxiously at his nephew, he whispered pleadingly:

'What was you a-sayin' to Mrs. F. when you was a-holdin' of her hands, Richard?'

'Oh!' groaned the other impatiently, 'there are some things that can't be talked about! I shouldn't have held her hands—I

scarcely knew that I was holding them. What does it matter now? We have said good-bye to each other for ever; we have made up our minds never to see each other again.'

Isaac's jaw dropped; he brought down his fist heavily on the bank beside him.

'Well,' he muttered under his breath, 'I'm danged! I can't get no satisfaction. Not a word!'

'You know enough,' said Richard fiercely. 'Be content with what I tell you—I will never darken your doors again.'

Isaac brought down his fist once more on the bank, and then slowly hoisted himself on to his feet.

'If ye haven't naught to say to I, I've summat to say to you,' he announced, speaking very slowly. 'I bain't a-goin' to let 'ee go off like that. 'T is my way to be straightfor'ard. I'll speak my mind plain to 'ee this night, and I'll speak my mind to Mrs. F. Where be Mrs. F.? Come along of I, Richard, and find her.'

He had squeezed through the gap in the hedge while still speaking, and Richard had no choice but to follow him. A few strides brought them to the dell, and, looking down, they descried Rosalie standing in the same attitude as that in which Richard had left her.

'Mrs. Fyander,' called Isaac, bending over the brink, 'will 'ee oblige me by stepping up here? The sides be a bit steep, and I bain't so young as I were—I can't very well go down, but I'd be obliged if you'd step up. I've summat to say to you and my nevvy here.'

Rosalie had started violently at the sound of his voice, and now obeyed his summons in silence; but she trembled so much, and the wet grass had become so slippery, that she stumbled often, and it was some time before she completed the ascent. Meanwhile both men stood watching her, motionless, and in silence. Once or twice she had raised her eyes towards the great white figure which awaited her on the brink, and it seemed to her that Isaac's face was grave and stern like the face of a judge. She did not dare once glance at Richard, but she felt, even without looking at him, that their secret was discovered.

The farmer backed a little away from the edge of the dell when Rosalie came forth, and stood looking from one to the other; then he spoke very solemnly, and with some hesitation.

'Mrs. Fyander, as I was a-sayin' to Richard jist now, 't is best to be straightfor'ard—'ees, 't is best to speak out, even when it be

hard to speak out. I can't get no satisfaction from Richard—he did acshally tell I to my face as he had made up his mind to go straight off wi'out a single word to I. He comes wi'out a word and he goes wi'out a word! Now, Mrs. F., I did see you together jist now, and I did think as you'd have summat to tell me.'

There was a long pause. Isaac looked once more from Rosalie's graceful shrinking figure to the other culprit, who stood with bent head, awaiting the storm of reproach and vituperation.

'From the very first,' pursued Isaac, still in that solemn and somewhat stern tone, 'I did tell 'ee my mind plain, Mrs. Fyander. I did tell 'ee straight out, didn't I? as I hadn't never fixed my thoughts on materimony. 'Twas you as was set on it——'

'Oh, I know,' interrupted Rosalie, 'I know it too well. Do not throw it in my face now!'

'Throw it in your face, Mrs. F.! Who's a-throwing o' what in your face? All I do say is I did al'ays do my best for 'ee—don't you go for to blame me, for blame I do not deserve.'

Both raised their heads and looked at him, astonished at the change of tone, for now the old man seemed to speak more in sorrow than in anger.

'I did al'ays do my best for 'ee. I did al'ays think and act as kind as I could, and you did never once think of I. 'Ees, I did never interfere,' he went on, more emphatically; 'I left ye both to yourselves—didn't I? I never comed in your way. But ye mid ha' given me a thought.'

The penitent heads drooped again. What need had they to be reminded how guileless he had been, how unsuspicious, how chivalrous in thought and deed?

'Ees,' went on Isaac, 'I did leave ye to yourselves—I did ax ye to make friends. Do you mind how often I axed ye to be friends?'

True indeed; only too true! They had taken a base advantage of his confidence; they had profited of the opportunities he had given them only to be more and more unfaithful to him in their hearts.

'I thought you'd be different to what you do be,' he continued, with increasing severity. 'When Sam'el Cross did tell I as you'd snap up Mrs. F., Richard, what did I say? Says I, "My nevvy bain't a snapper!" D'ye mind? I said the same thing to you. Well, I thought maybe you'd say summat then—but not a word!'

' Uncle, I—it isn't fair to reproach me like this. I kept away from Littlecomb as long as I could ; you know that.'

' Ees, I do know it, Richard—I know it very well ; you wouldn't come with me when I did ax 'ee that Sunday. You wouldn't come along o' me to Littlecomb ; nay, but you went out by yourself that night, and when you comed back ye wouldn't so much as sit down and smoke a pipe like a honest Christian ; and next day you must get up and go off wi' yourself before 'twere light. And what did I do then—what did I do, Richard, though you'd gone off and left me wi'out so much as a line ? I didn't give up hopes of 'ee yet. I went and wrote 'ee a letter and told 'ee to come back, and all 'ud be forgive and forgot. There now, and what do 'ee say to that ? '

His face was working with emotion, his voice tremulous for all its strength. Never in his life, probably, had Isaac Sharpe put so many words together, and every one of them came from his heart. To the young people it seemed as though all their struggles had been futile, their good desires vain, their great sacrifice useless : for all their days they would be branded with infamy. They had, indeed, stopped short of the breach of faith to which both had been so strongly tempted, but they had nevertheless violated trust.

' And even now,' said Isaac—' even at the very last, when you were for cuttin' off wi'out no explanation, I did give 'ee one more chance—and you wouldn't take it.'

' What in Heaven's name do you want to say ? ' cried Richard, goaded to desperation. ' Do you want me to tell you to your face that I love the woman you are going to marry ? '

' Nay now,' returned his uncle in an expostulatory tone, ' I wouldn't go so far as that. I bain't unreasonable. All I did ever think o' axin' ye was for you and Mrs. F. to see if ye couldn't take to each other. That were my notion. Ye might ha' gived each other a fair trial—a fair trial ! '

The young couple stared at him blankly, hardly believing their ears ; then Richard cried out with a gasp :

' Rosalie, do you hear—do you understand ? He wanted us to love each other ! '

' Nay,' interrupted the farmer, in a tone that was at once dignified and explanatory, ' I didn't expect so much straight off—Love ! No, no, not love—but ye mid ha' jist tried to fancy one another ! Ye mid ha' had a bit o' consideration for me, I think. Ye knowed, both on ye, as materimony wouldn't come easy to I ;

and seein' as you did tell me plain, Richard, the very first night you come home, as you was on the look-out for a wife, why not Mrs. F. so well as another ?'

It was Rosalie's turn to gasp now, and her face bloomed like a rose in the evening light; but neither she nor Richard spoke; both were so suddenly brought down from their heights of heroics that it was natural they should feel somewhat dizzy and confused.

'I'm a man o' my word,' said Isaac, 'and if ye have made up your mind and fixed your ch'ice on I., Mrs. F., why'—drawing a deep breath—'I'll keep my promise, my dear. But if Richard 'ud do so well as me 't 'ud be a deal more convenient, d'ye see? It 'ud seem a bit queer to change my state at my time o' life, and to leave the old home where I was born and bred. And Richard, he has a very good notion o' farmin', and he'd be willing to carry on the work in the old way, and to take advice from I., d'ye see? Ah, the notion did come to I soon arter he comded here. Thinks I to myself, I wonder if Richard 'ud do—'t 'ud be a deal more suitable, thinks I; and more satisfactory to all parties.'

Here Isaac was interrupted by a sudden burst of laughter from his nephew—laughter which was indeed the outlet of such an extraordinary mixture of emotions that they had nearly found vent in tears. The exquisite sense of relief, the unhoped-for joy stirred his very heart's depths; but, on the other hand, the humour of the situation struck him with almost equal force. After the overwhelming remorse, the bitter sense of shame, which but a few moments ago had tortured them, to discover that their contemplated sacrifice had very nearly set at naught good old Isaac's dearest wish!

'O uncle, uncle!' he cried as soon as the first ecstatic outburst of mirth had subsided, 'why did you not speak before ?'

'Twouldn't ha' been very becomin' for me to speak,' returned the farmer, still with great dignity. 'I knowed my dooty to Mrs. F., and I weren't a-goin' to say nothin' as mid hurt her feelin's. But I did try and bring ye together, Richard; and I did try to give ye so many hints as I could. D'ye mind how often I did say what a dear woman Mrs. F. were, and what a good wife she'd make? Ah, many a time I did. And d'ye mind how I used to tell 'ee it was bad to hurt a woman's feelin's? And you wouldn't take a bit o' pains to be friendly and pleasant wi' her! I did look for some return from 'ee, Richard,

and I were disapp'nted. And I did expect at least as ye would tell me straight whether you could take to the notion or whether ye couldn't. 'Twas the least ye mid do, I think. 'I were that anxious, and that upset—I don't see as it's any laughin' matter,' he continued with gathering wrath, for Rosalie's face was now dimpling all over with smiles and Richard's hilarity seemed to increase rather than diminish. 'Come, I'll have a straight answer one way or t'other. Will ye give up this here stupid notion o' going out o' the country, Richard, and bide here and see if you and Mrs. F. can't make it up between ye? And you, Mrs. F., my dear, will 'ee jist think over this here matter, and see if Richard wouldn't do as well as me?'

Richard suddenly ceased laughing, and stepped to Rosalie's side.

'Will you, Rosalie?' he said, very gently and tenderly.
'Will you try to like me a little?'

And, without waiting for an answer, he took her hands and laid them softly about his own neck, and stooped and kissed her.

'Dear heart alive!' exclaimed Isaac, clapping his hands. 'That weren't sich a bad beginning, Richard, I will say! You bain't very slack once you do make a start.' He paused to laugh, long and loud. 'Well, I never!' he cried. 'Nay, Richard, ye don't do things by halves. Well, Mrs. F., my dear,' he added, more anxiously, seeing that Rosalie did not speak, 'what d'ye say?'

'I suppose,' returned Rosalie faintly, with her face half hidden on Richard's shoulder, 'I suppose I'll have to try.'

'Do 'ee now, my dear,' cried Isaac, much relieved. 'Ye'll find ye won't *re*-pent it. And ye'll not lose nothing by it neither,' he added as an afterthought. 'Richard be jist the same as a son to I—he'll have all as I've a-got to leave when I be gone. I don't want for to seem unkind, but it 'ud be a very great comfort to me if ye could make up your mind to it.'

'Oh, I think,' murmured Rosalie, 'that I can make up my mind to it.'

'Well, then,' cried Isaac, chuckling and rubbing his hands, 'all's well as ends well! 'Ees, we may say that—all's well as ends well! We'll be the best o' friends as ever; but I do think as Richard 'ull be more suitable as a husband, my dear. Ye mid as well see Mrs. F. home now, Richard. I think I'll go back to my bit o' supper; 'twill be cold enough by now, I reckon.'

With a nod and a broad smile he left them, and pursued his

homeward way, pausing ever and anon to look backwards at the two lithe young figures which moved slowly along above the dark irregular line of hedge—the bent heads, very close together, outlined against the lambent evening sky. Once, after one of these backward glances, he began to chuckle :

‘They’ve a-took to the notion nicely,’ he said. ‘Ees, I reckon they’ll do !’

THE END.

The Disappearance of Plants.

IT cannot be doubted that the flora of Great Britain has considerably changed during the last three hundred years. On the one hand a goodly number of plants, many of them from America, have found their way into this country and have become completely naturalised. Among these may be mentioned such characteristic species as the pretty yellow balsam, which lines the banks of the Wey near Guildford and of other Surrey streams; the little white Claytonia, which may now be found abundantly on the sandy heaths of Bagshot and of Wolmer Forest; and the Canadian pond-weed, which since 1847 has spread so rapidly through our canals and rivers. But, on the other hand, many interesting species of the old English flora have become exceedingly scarce, while a few have altogether disappeared. Some plants, apparently common in the days of the early botanists, must now be reckoned among our greatest rarities, and will never again be found in their old localities. If 'Master Doctor' Turner, the father of English botany, or old Gerarde the herbalist, or the illustrious John Ray, could come to life again, they would search in vain the ancient haunts of many of their most notable species. Many causes have contributed to this unfortunate result. The growth of towns consequent on the vast increase of our population, the draining of the fens, improved methods of agriculture, the rapacity of dealers, the collecting energy of modern botanists—all have helped to impoverish the richness of the British flora. Still, considering the changed condition of the face of the country, it may be a matter of surprise that the number of rare plants is not more seriously reduced.

But few species, at any rate, have become absolutely extinct in Great Britain. The Alpine cotton-grass is gone from the bogs of Forfar, and a sedge from its only known locality near Bath. A vetch with 'long white flowers,' formerly found by Ray on Glastonbury Tor, is also gone, and a near relation, *Vicia lœvigata*,

which once occupied the Chesil Beach near Weymouth, and is now extinct, not only in England, but in the whole world. That interesting member of the Lily group, *Simethis bicolor*, formerly to be found near Bournemouth, was extirpated before the year 1875; and it is to be feared that the little *Holosteum umbellatum* will never again be seen on the old walls of Norwich, or Bury, or Eye.

But while few species have become entirely extinct as regards Great Britain as a whole, yet a large number seem to be on the verge of it. Plants formerly not uncommon, and to be found in several counties, are now extremely rare and confined to one or two localities. This is especially the case with some of our orchids; and several species, such as the lizard orchis, the coral-root, the lady's slipper, the leafless Epipogum, and the Fen orchis, may soon have to be reckoned among our extinct species. The sweet-scented sea stock, one of the most showy and beautiful plants in our native flora, is extinct on the cliffs at Hastings, and is now only to be found in the Isle of Wight, where it flourishes on the perpendicular face of the inaccessible chalk cliffs. The exquisite little Trichonema, a dwarf member of the Iris family, exists only in one locality in South Devon. The field Eryngo, while it may still be seen in the historic locality where John Ray noticed it in the year 1662, has probably disappeared elsewhere in England. In former years the rugged heights of Portland were clothed with the handsome tree-mallow, which also grew 'at Hurst Castle, over against the Isle of Wight.' In both these localities, and indeed along the whole of the southern coast, except in Devon and Cornwall, this splendid plant, so dear to the ancient herbalist, will now be sought for in vain.

In the Isle of Wight, to take a small and well-known botanical district, many plants formerly existed which must now be omitted from the *Flora Vectensis*. To judge from a statement in the works of Lobel, in the year 1665 the sea-colewort or wild cabbage, the parent of our garden species, was not uncommon on the Island cliffs. As late as the middle of the last century it grew plentifully on the crumbled chalk at the foot of the Culvers. It had disappeared from that locality by the year 1870, and is now lost to the Island. About the year 1835 John Stuart Mill, who found his only recreation in botany, discovered in Sandown Bay a single specimen of the rare purple spurge. This specimen is still carefully preserved, but the plant has not been met with in the Island since. On the pebbly beach of the same bay the seaside everlasting pea formerly existed; this, too, is gone, and also the very rare

Diotis maritima, or seaside cotton-weed. In the rough broken ground of the Undercliff, especially in the neighbourhood of the little church of St. Lawrence, once celebrated as the smallest church in England, and about the ivy-clad ruins of Wolverton, that handsome plant, the stinking hellebore or setterwort, formerly grew in some abundance. It was plentiful in the year 1839, when the celebrated botanist, Dr. Bromfield, visited the spot, when he pronounced it to be, in his opinion, ‘most certainly wild.’ Since then the neighbourhood has been much built over, and a good deal of the ‘rough ground’ has been converted into private gardens, and it is to be feared that this most interesting plant has perished. Near the grand old Jacobean manor-house of Knighton, now, alas! pulled down, of which we have so fine a description in Legh Richmond’s *Dairyman’s Daughter*, there formerly grew the dwale, or deadly nightshade, a striking plant both in flower and in fruit. This, like the ‘large and venerable mansion,’ has disappeared, and must now, with other notable species—the prolific pink, the grass of Parnassus, the spider orchis, the beautiful white helleborine, and the vernal squill—be counted as extinct in the Isle of Wight.

The disappearance of some of these plants is doubtless due to what may be called the sporadic nature of certain species. It is the way of some plants to spring up suddenly in a strange locality, to remain perhaps for a few years, and as mysteriously to disappear. We have a striking illustration of this in the case of *Sisymbrium Irio*, or the London rocket. The plant, as is well known, received its English name from the curious fact that after the Great Fire of London in 1666 it came up plentifully ‘among the rubbish in the ruins.’ During the two following summers it was abundant, Ray tells us, and even established itself ‘on the Lord Cheney’s wall at Chelsey,’ but finally it entirely disappeared. An equally striking instance occurred at Aldborough, in Suffolk, in the case of *Lathyrus maritimus*, the seaside everlasting pea. Old Stow, in his ‘Chronicle,’ tells us that ‘in the great dearth which happened in the year 1555 the poor people in this part of the country maintained themselves and their children with these Pease, which,’ saith he, ‘to a miracle sprung up in the autumn among the bare stones of their own accord, and bore fruit sufficient for thousands of people.’ ‘That these Pease did spring up miraculously for the relief of the poor I believe not,’ adds John Ray, who repeats the story; ‘neither did they owe their original to shipwrecks or Pease cast out of ships, as Camden hints to be

the opinion of the wiser ; but, without doubt, sprung up at first spontaneously.' Ray speaks of the plant as still (1695) growing abundantly on 'the stone-baich between Orford and Alburgh, called the shingle, especially on the further end towards Orford.' It is now very rare, and has not, we believe, been met with on the Suffolk coast for many years. This sporadic nature doubtless explains the disappearance of the same plant from the beach at Sandown, as well as of the purple spurge and of *Diotis maritima*. In former years this latter plant has been recorded for many localities along the coast. Old Gerarde found it in Mersea Isle, off the Essex shore ; it grew at Southwold in Suffolk, and near the ruins of old Dunwich Church ; it has been met with near Poole and Bridport in Dorsetshire, and at several spots on the Cornish coast ; but in all these places it is now probably extinct. It is well known that in some seasons certain of our orchidaceous plants are far more abundant than in others. This is specially the case with those species which frequent the downs, such as the bee orchis, the frog orchis, and the musk orchis. In the early summer of 1898 the latter appeared in extraordinary abundance on a small patch of down-land in the writer's parish. There were literally hundreds of plants. Not content with occupying the down, they invaded the *débris* of an adjoining chalk-pit, and sprang up in every possible situation. The following season it required a good deal of searching to find so much as a single specimen.

But if in some few instances the disappearance of interesting plants can be thus naturally accounted for, in the great majority of cases it is due to the inroads of civilisation, with its building operations and scientific methods of agriculture. It is very curious to come across, in old books, the names of plants and wild flowers which in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were to be seen growing in London and its neighbourhood. There are many such notices to be found scattered up and down the writings of Gerarde and Ray, and others of the early botanists. For instance, the little wall-rue fern was to be found on 'an old stone conduit between Islington and Jack Straw's Castle,' and the royal Osmunda flourished on Hampstead Heath, together with the lily-of-the-valley. The mistletoe might be seen growing 'on some trees at Clarendon House, St. James's.' In Lambeth Marsh the very rare 'frogge-bit' grew, 'where any that is disposed may see it,' and the arrow-head in 'the Tower ditch,' and also 'by Lambeth Bridge over against the Archbishop of Canterbury's Palace.' In the 'moat that encompasses the seat of the Right Reverend the

Bishop of London at Fulham' might be seen the sweet-smelling flag, and the yellow water-lily, and the scarce *Cardamine impatiens*. The sweet-scented camomile was common at Westminster, and the wild clary in 'the fields of Holborne neere unto Grayes Inne,' in 'a lane against St. Paneras' Church' the wild lettuce grew, and the deadly nightshade in a ditch at Islington, and the beautiful marsh gentian on Clapham Common; while the rare 'vervaine mallow' was to be seen 'on the ditch sides on the left hand of the place of execution by London, called Tyborn.' Needless to say, these plants have long since disappeared; and what has happened in the case of the 'all-devouring wen,' as Cobbett years ago called London, has been repeated in a lesser degree in many districts throughout the country.

But more destructive to our native flora than even the growth of towns must be reckoned the vast system of drainage which has been carried out in many parts of England. In olden times, to take the most striking illustration, the great fen district of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdon was a grand place to the naturalist. Kingsley has painted in glowing colours the ancient glories of Whittlesea Mere, where 'dark green alders and pale-green reeds stretched for miles round the broad lagoon; where the coot clanked and the bittern boomed, and the sedge-bird, not content with its own sweet song, mocked the notes of all the birds around; while high overhead hung, motionless, hawk beyond hawk, buzzard beyond buzzard, kite beyond kite, as far as eye could see.' It is all changed now. The vast solitude, the home of some of our rarest wild flowers, the haunt of the great copper butterfly, now lost to the whole world, the breeding-place of ruffs and reeves, has been converted into enormous cornfields, where

All the land in flowery squares,
Beneath a broad and equal-blowing wind,
Smells of the coming summer.

And the rare plants are gone. The fen orchis, *Liparis Loeselii*, the glory of the fen flora, formerly to be found in Burwell and Bottisham fens, and elsewhere in similar situations in the Eastern counties, is now probably extinct; and the same must be said of the well-known rarities of the district, *Senecio paludosus*, *S. palustris*, and *Sonchus palustris*, or the marsh sow-thistle. It has been calculated that no less than fifty species

have been lost to the flora of Cambridgeshire, and most of them in consequence of the draining of the fens. The same process has naturally produced similar results elsewhere. In the year 1667 John Goodyer, a famous botanist, discovered the marsh *Isnardia* near the great pond on Petersfield Heath, in Hampshire. This plant is one of our greatest rarities, being known to exist in only one or two localities in Great Britain. Up to the middle of the last century it maintained its position on Petersfield Heath, where, in the summer of 1848, it was seen in considerable plenty by Dr. Bromfield, the author of the *Flora Vectensis*. Since then the marshy spots where it flourished have been drained, and this interesting plant has now entirely disappeared from the historic locality where, in the middle of the seventeenth century, it was first discovered to be a British plant.

Other changes, too, to the detriment of our flora have passed over the face of the country. Not only have bogs been drained, but large tracts of heath and downland have come under the plough, and what was formerly open country is now enclosed and cultivated. The roadside wastes, where in the autumn flocks of goldfinches might be seen feeding on the thistle-seeds, have in many districts been taken in, and even the hedgerows have been stubbed up and thrown into the fields. The Commons Inclosure Act of 1845 has been disastrous alike to the fauna and flora of the country. In parts of Essex the thick hedgerows, beautiful in early summer with honeysuckle and dog-roses, have almost entirely disappeared, and hardly a bank is left for the violet and the primrose and the lesser celandine. Not so many years ago the rare and beautiful Martagon lily might be seen growing plentifully up a green lane, bounded by high banks and old copse-like hedges, in the neighbourhood of Saffron Walden. The banks have now been levelled and the plant is gone.

In some few instances the very beauty of a plant tends to its destruction. The wild daffodil and the wild snowdrop are becoming scarcer every year owing to their eradication for purposes of sale. On some of the Hampshire hangers, where every spring may be seen the truly splendid sight of

A host of golden daffodils
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze,

it has become necessary to have a keeper constantly on the watch in order to save the plants from total extinction. In one parish in the Isle of Wight, formerly noted for the abundance of snow-

drops to be seen in the fields and hedgerows, the plant has become so scarce that the writer could find only a few small patches last spring. The flowers had been transplanted into gardens, he was told, or sold in the neighbouring town. The same fate has overtaken a colony of that most rare and beautiful plant, the fritillary, or snake's head, which has almost entirely disappeared from a damp meadow where fifty years ago it was plentiful. Another rare plant which has suffered from the same cause is the fragrant *Daphne mezereum*. This beautiful shrub, which flowers in early spring, often in the month of February, before the leaves appear, used not to be uncommon in the Hampshire woods, especially about Andover and in the neighbourhood of Selborne. In Gilbert White's time it grew on the hanger, 'among the shrubs at the S.E. end, above the cottages.' In the writer's parish, some six miles from Selborne, it used often to be found in former years when the underwood was cut. One old woodman still living remembers having seen as many as thirty or forty plants in a single copse. Though still frequent in cottage gardens, the shrub is now almost extinct in our woods, owing in a great measure, to quote a Hampshire writer of fifty years ago, to 'the avidity with which it has been hunted out and dug up for transplanting by the cottagers, either for their own use or for sale to the nurserymen.' It is now lost on Selborne Hanger, and in the writer's parish there is only, to his knowledge, one single wild plant remaining. So, too, with the beautiful *Dianthus cæsius*, or Cheddar pink, which formerly covered the romantic limestone cliffs from which it takes its name. It is now nearly destroyed in this its only native habitat in Great Britain, through the mercenary habit of digging up the plants for sale to visitors.

And what has happened to many species of our rarer and more beautiful flowering plants has taken place in a still more lamentable degree in the case of our native ferns. All over the country—in Yorkshire, in Wales, in Devonshire, in the home counties—they have been ruthlessly destroyed for purposes of gain. Many of our choicest species are on the verge of extinction from this single cause. Our very hedgerows are being denuded of the commoner but not less beautiful kinds by lazy tramps, who hawk them around in towns and villages. When, in January 1624, Mr. John Goodyer 'rode between Rake and Headley in Hampshire, neare Wollmer Forest,' he saw enough maidenhair spleenwort 'to lode an horse with ;' it is doubtful if a single specimen of the plant

could be found to-day. In Gilbert White's time the lanes about Selborne 'abounded,' he tells us, 'with curious ferns ;' there are very few to be found now. The Tunbridge fern is almost extinct at Tunbridge, and the sea spleenwort in the Isle of Wight. But it is needless to continue the mournful catalogue. The fact is too patent to require illustration. It should, however, be borne in mind that unless persons were found ready to buy the spoil the trade in native plants would quickly cease. The time has surely come when all lovers of Nature and of country life should use every endeavour to preserve what yet remains to us of the flora of Great Britain.

JOHN VAUGHAN.

My Only Ghost.

THE beginning of this unadorned record of curious facts, and only the beginning, for the good reason that it had then got no further, I told in the year 1884 in *Holly Leaves*, the Christmas number of the *Sporting and Dramatic News*. On that occasion although I did not, as I see on rereading the account, add one jot to the seeming facts, yet I left out one or two noteworthy details, which were at that time for considerations of space and other considerations left out. The then editor of the *Sporting and Dramatic News*, an old and highly valued friend of mine—Mr. Alfred Watson—kindly asked me for a story for his Christmas number, and in reply I gave him a brief outline of the occurrence and asked him, should I dress it up for publication with a more or less conventional story more or less vaguely connecting the appearance with supposed facts afterwards ascertained? He answered, ‘No; please tell it exactly as it seemed to happen.’ And so, with the reservations above indicated, I did. The only other spectator of the portent—and please let it be noted at once that there was another spectator—has just confirmed my memory, which to be sure was not likely to fade, of all the circumstances connected with this first experience. And so, with this brief preface, I will plunge into the narration, which is reproduced, with the added details to which I have referred, on account of its curious sequel not very long ago.

One night in the summer or autumn of 1884 (unluckily I have no record of the exact date) my wife and I went to see a well-known play at the Lyceum, not at all for the first time. We expected a party of four to join us, but they were unavoidably prevented from coming. We had the box—an unusually large one—next to the Royal Box, and because we expected these friends my wife sat at the extreme left corner in the front of the box, while I occupied the corresponding corner on the right. It will be seen that by this arrangement we regarded the stage and the

house from different angles of vision. It will be remembered that at the Lyceum when the curtain goes up the lights in the auditorium go down. During the first act, at a moment when I was not looking closely at the stage, my attention was caught by something in the stalls, something so strange, so startling, and withal so weirdly fascinating, that it completely held my gaze for probably a minute or more, in the course of which I thought to myself, 'This is a strange fantasy, due to some trick of light on the folds of a cloak or a dress. It reminds one of the cloak in *Tom Cringle's Log*. If I take my eyes off the thing and presently look back, it will have vanished into thin air.' This I accordingly did, and when after a few minutes I looked back there the appearance still was, as vivid, as startling, as impressive as before. While I was still looking hard at it the act-drop fell and the lights went up, whereat the vision disappeared. Only a few seconds previously I had chanced to look round momentarily at my wife, and observed that she was looking down at the stalls in exactly the direction, as I thought, where my own gaze had been fixed.

On the fall of the drop we talked of this, that, and the other, and casually asked each other as to recognition of friends and acquaintances in various parts of the house. Each seemed to wish to say something of a less commonplace kind and to hesitate at the utterance. After a short silence we asked each other, almost simultaneously, 'You were looking, were you not, at the third row of stalls?' The answer came pat from my wife, 'Yes. So were you. Which stall?' 'The fifth,' I answered. 'So were you. What did you see there?' The reply to this surprised me not at all, since it described exactly what I had seen myself, 'a dead man's head in the lap of the lady in the old-fashioned burnous.' Then the curtain went up again, and naturally enough we both directed our opera-glasses to the fifth stall in the third row. There the appearance was again exactly as before. There was nothing shocking or terrifying about it. The face was finely featured. The hair, moustache, and Vandyke beard were of a soft grey, the lower part of the neck seemed hidden in the folds of the burnous, the eyes were shut, the expression was perfectly peaceful, and the whole effect suggested the head of a cavalier whom Vandyke might have painted after the subject's death.

When the act-drop went up it appeared again, and now, giving the blank leaf of a letter and a pencil to my wife, I asked her to draw the thing as it appeared to her. The drawing represented

exactly the thing which continued to compel my attention. On the fall of the drop the lady in the stall moved and disarranged the folds of her burnous. I called my wife's observation to this, saying that such a movement would doubtless dispel the vision, and I went down to the stalls to look more closely at the occupant of the fifth stall in the third row. There was nothing in any way remarkable about the lady. I returned to the box convinced that we had seen the last of the apparition; but the moment the drop went up again the head again became visible in its old position, and so it remained until the fall of the curtain at the end of the play. Of course one fell to wondering if a telegraph-boy or a breathless messenger would appear and seek out the lady, but nothing of the kind happened. The lady moved out quite unperturbed with the rest of the crowd in the stalls, and we went home making various conjectures as to possible effects of light, reflection, refraction, and so on, but in truth remarkably puzzled. Of course both then and after I had published the story we were on the alert for anything that might seem to have any bearing upon this strange experience, but it was not until the whole thing had so far dropped out of memory as to be no longer talked about that something occurred to bring it vividly back to recollection.

Between three and four years ago we left London and took up our abode in the village of Chawton (Alton, Hampshire), well known as having been for some time the residence of Miss Austen, whose great-nephew, Mr. Montagu G. Knight, is the present lord of the manor. Chawton House, the manor house, is also well known itself as a very fine specimen of Elizabethan architecture. As of duty bound it is sometimes credited with a ghost or two, but these have nothing whatever to do with the present narrative. I knew both the outside and the inside of Chawton House tolerably well long before we took up our abode under its gracious shadow, and my wife knew it a great deal better than I did. Furthermore, when we settled at Chawton, I, being both by inclination and journalistic training an amateur of pictures, soon got to know the interesting contents of the house in this line better than I was able to know them from short visits. It was between a year and two years ago that I made, by an odd chance, the acquaintance of a certain picture in the house which I had never before seen. It happened in this way. Mrs. Knight one day when I was calling kindly asked my opinion as to some small changes in the arrangement of some of the pictures, and

having settled this point we proceeded to go round the house in case there might be some pictures new to me. There were some such in a dimly lighted little gallery leading off from the top of the great staircase. These we looked at, and just as we were about to go down again Mrs. Knight remembered that there was a rather curious picture hanging in a corner so near the ceiling as to be practically out of sight. Accordingly I got a candle and a chair to stand on. If I were writing fiction I should probably say that I nearly fell off the chair with astonishment on seeing the portrait, for such it is. As a matter of fact I certainly did start, since there, facing me, pose for pose and feature for feature, was the Lyceum ghost, like a dream come to life, or rather to picture-life. The only difference between the head at the Lyceum and the head in the portrait was that the hair and the beard and moustache were a soft brown instead of a soft grey. The head, resting on a pillow, was visible only to the top of the neck, the rest being covered in folds as like as might be to those of the burnous seen in the stall at the Lyceum. Naturally I explained my surprise to Mrs. Knight by relating the story hereinbefore set forth, and I begged her not to mention the existence of the picture, or my recognition of it, to my wife. A few days later I personally conducted my wife to see the picture without giving her a hint that there was anything special about it beyond its being, to my seeming, a fine piece of work. The curious in spook-lore may note that my wife showed a certain disinclination to visit the portrait, which still hung in its former place. When she did see the picture she used almost exactly the same words that I had used: 'Why, it's the Lyceum ghost!' After this the picture was taken down to be examined in full light, and after this examination it was promoted to a place of honour. It is a portrait taken after death of a singularly handsome and aristocratic-looking man. It is in what is known as the school of Vandyke, and according to dates and places might by bare possibility have been an early work by the master himself. The canvas bears this inscription in the upper right-hand corner :

Clarissimi viri Davidis Lerimontii ducis incliti effigies : qui postquam in Suetiâ et Germaniâ militiam summâ cum laude exercuit tandem in strenuâ Büssembergensis ad Albim propugnaculi contra Cœsarianos defensione infelicissimo trajectu globulo diem obiit Hamburghi 7 Septbris An. 1627, Etatis suaæ 32.

The Latin, it will be perceived, is less excellent than the face and its portraiture, but there is nothing surprising in that. It is, however, noteworthy that there is no connection known to those who would naturally know between Learmonts and Knights or Austens, and that the records of the Knight family contain no shadow of a hint as to how or why the picture came into the possession of the owners of Chawton House. Here ends for the present the story of the Lyceum ghost. There was a long interval between what may be called the first and the second acts, and as yet there is no sign of a third. May it or may it not be said that 'if it be not now yet it will come'?

WALTER HERRIES POLLOCK.

The Amateur Poacher.

THERE is a peculiar pleasure to the sportsman who is fond of Nature, as every sportsman should be, in the kind of shooting that we understand by amateur poaching. It is not that a man goes out to shoot, by stealth, his neighbour's game. That would indeed have a quality of satisfaction quite its own, adding the joy of the crime to the joy of the sport, with the further risk of being caught red-handed. What we think of, rather, is the sport of the man who goes out in his own covert for a walk with a gun to pass an hour or two of a winter's afternoon, and to see what he can bring home for the pot. It is a kind of sport that really is most enjoyable where there is very little to be shot, for if there be even a tolerable plenty of game, then the bag quickly gets so heavy that to carry it is a sufficient burden to interfere with enjoyment ; and to be accompanied by even the most faithful henchman robs the whole thing of much of its peculiar quality. Moreover, the scarcer the game the more interesting does it become to see how much you can secure for the pot ; for if you can be sure of filling that pot without trouble, what in the world is its use or interest as an element in your walk and pleasure ?

The amateur poacher is by preference one who goes alone ; and in most cases I would prefer that he should be without the companionship even of a canine friend. There may be patches of covert where a spaniel, a terrier, or a retriever is useful in pushing out a rabbit or a pheasant ; but, as a rule, a dog—even a well-broken dog—will lose you more shots than he will gain you in this kind of shooting ; you will do better to leave him at home, even if it do mean that you lose a bird for want of his good nose to find it when you have killed it far out over thick covert. After all, you are not likely to lose anything larger than a partridge, provided it be killed dead and be not a 'runner,' and you are unlikely to drop your partridge in heavy covert.

There is a special charm in going down the woodland ways,

where the autumn leafage is still clinging on the bough, alone, in silence, stealthily, like a guilty thing. One charm is that you see all Nature so much more at home in its undisturbed peace than when the things are being driven to you by a line of beaters working the covert. You feel that you are, as it were, a part of this Nature of the woodland that moves through the leafy ways as silently as yourself. For very silently you must move if you are to do any good, and to come on these keen-eared and quick-eyed things unawares. For that is what you have to do—you have to go so quietly, so noiselessly, and with such slow movement (for this last is a manner of approach that is too much neglected by those who stalk the ‘small deer’) that they shall scarcely suspect you of being that fearful thing, a human being, even if they do catch sight of you—shall at least pause a moment to reflect before fleeing from you, with a momentary hesitation that you may make fatal. For this noiseless approach you should choose a day when all is damp and dank, when the leaf is soft and moist, so that it will bend without any aggressive crackling under your tread. Winter has come, and the leaf that has clung to the tree so stoutly is just beginning to give a chance of seeing the creatures moving in the undergrowth. Hitherto, as soon as a rabbit was across a ride, it was gone as completely as if a curtain had been drawn before it. Now the chances are better. Really the best way is to stand motionless and let the things crawl and play towards you. If you can but persuade yourself to an absolute immobility, it is wonderful how invisible you seem to be to the keen-sighted birds and beasts. Even the shyest and cleverest of the wood-pigeons may be deceived by it, though it is true that the amateur poacher begins to find the wood-pigeon a much altered and much more wary bird after the first covert shoots. He has been shot at often at long range, with a result that has not injured his power of flight, but has set his nerves on edge and put him on the constant alert. For all that, the trees are heavy with acorns, and his crop is apt to be so full of them that now and again he pays the poacher no attention till the enemy is near at hand. Then a scurry through the oak boughs and a flapping of wings announce that a pigeon has gone away—as often as not, invisible.

Although most of the trees are losing their leaves, the stout oaks are keeping them gallantly; and the pigeons, with their knack of getting out of a tree on the side remote from a gunner, are hard to come to terms with. The day when the poacher can best delude the pigeons is one of those days of high gusty wind,

with a drizzle of rain in it. The rain will keep the leaves moist and the ways soft underfoot, so that the amateur poacher, going Agag-like, delicately, makes no sound ; and any sound that he does make, to speak after the fashion of the Irishman of English proverb, is drowned in the gusts of the storm that rattle all the covert's high growth. Within the covert the gunner is in shelter, warm, and scarcely conscious of the winds without ; but the wind is soughing up in the trees, and occasionally pelting the acorns down, so that the quickest-eared pigeon will hear no footstep. The pigeons are in here, in this oak covert, but the oak wood is not their home.

They do but come here to feast themselves full to repletion on the acorns, but their home and their roosting-place is in the Scotch firs of the big wood on the opposite side of the stream. Here you may stand under the trees, in the evening, and have good shots at them as they come in to roost. The pigeon has a certain method of coming to his roosting-place that you ought to know if you are to make a bag. There are places, but they are rare, where the pigeon comes in with such confidence that he will go straight to his chosen tree and bough, and settle himself there without any scouting. But, as a rule, the birds take some little precaution before settling. On a day of gusty wind, such as is best for the shooting of them (on a dark, misty, stormy day they will begin to come in to roost earlier, so that you have longer time for making a bag), their usual plan is to beat up till they have a good offing to windward of their roosting trees. Then they come down, with a slant of wind behind them, scudding at a furious rate over the tree-tops. It would be impossible for them to perch at the rate they are going, and equally impossible to shoot quick enough to catch them before they have passed the gap between the trees that gives you your only chance at them. Then if all seems safe at this rapid survey, they will make a wide turn and come beating up to windward, slowly fighting their way to their haven. It is then the gunner's opportunity comes, when the bird is poising, sometimes almost motionless, against the breeze. By the same token, it requires a stiffish breeze to reduce the strength and speed of the wood-pigeon to even comparative stillness ; but he has to poise for a moment before alighting, and if you can catch him at this moment it is a deadly one. It is a far more deadly moment than the next, when he will have perched and will have the strong armour of his wings folded more than half about him, and all his feathers lying close and compact. Now, as he is still in flight, his feathers are all loose and open, his

wings expanded, everywhere he is vulnerable. Yet, even so, so tough a bird is he that now and again, even when you catch him in this most favourable pose, you may skin him of a fluff of feathers, and yet he will go away apparently unharmed. There is no bird in all the woodland that is his equal for going away with a charge of shot under the skin. Should your pigeon, as you stand watching for him, settle without giving you a chance of a shot, and also, as happens often, in such a place that you cannot see him, where he sits, for the screen of foliage, then it is best to be in no special hurry to alarm him by moving hither and thither to get sight of him. You may think that so long as he sits there, even if you do not see him, others of his own kind do, so that he is acting all the while as a decoy to lure them in. Remember, if you use decoy birds—whether stuffed birds, birds you have killed, or simply the likenesses of birds cut out of wood or tin—that there is a certain position in which the living bird, whom you are trying to simulate with your imitations, sits, and one position only—with regard to the wind. He will sit head to wind, for it is with head to wind, and thus only, that a bird can rise on the wing; and the pigeon is ever ready to rise on the wing at a moment's notice. If you put up your decoy birds with their heads down-wind, they will not have a natural look even to you, if you are—as every successful amateur poacher must needs be—an observant field naturalist; and much less will they have a natural look to the wild pigeon scouring the clouds overhead and seeking a safe place to come to roost. The decoy with head down-wind will not serve to inspire these high-fliers with any confidence—rather the reverse—for they will say to themselves: ‘Why, what the mischief is the matter with my poor friend down there?’ and will begin to make a careful inspection of the whole case and its surroundings (including you and your gun) accordingly. Provided you are careful about this matter of the pigeon's attitude in relation to the wind, it does not so much signify that the decoy should be strangely unlike the natural pigeon. In his figure the live pigeon varies greatly, according as it pleases him to wear his feathers lying close in to his slim body, or bunched out like a ball; and his attitude varies no less, accordingly, as he is pluming himself or simply resting in meditation. So that a thing of wood or tin, hoisted up to the tree-top, looks just as real to the live bird looking down on it as the best stuffed imitation. It is worth the while of the amateur poacher to have some of these dummies arranged on long, light, jointed poles, for there is no creature more easily

deceived by its gregarious instincts than the pigeon that is usually so shy and wily.

But just now, in the acorn time, when the pigeons come to the oak trees, you will hear them far more often than you will see them, and dummies are really not much use, for come to the acorns they will, dummies or no dummies, and it is not very easy to get a dummy up on those oak trees, which are still dense with foliage, in a manner that is even passably natural. As a rule, all you know about the pigeon is a hustle in the tree overhead, as you go your stealthy way through the covert, a great flap and clap of wings, and a glimpse of a ghost of a bird scudding away on the other side of the leafage. There is small chance of a shot at it, and despair and rage possess you. But now and again one will forget the cunning common to its kind, and give you a sight of itself within easy range in a gap between the trees. At such times, the pigeon with his crop loaded with acorns seems an easier mark, and less hard and tough, than when he is leaner and in better case for flight.

The rabbits dash across the soft mossy ride in front of you, and sometimes one stops in the underwood so that the poacher, shooting for the pot, might make sure of a rabbit pie with no trouble. But though there is no trouble in the shooting of the coney, there is a trouble about the carrying of him, trouble that old experience is likely to bring to the mind of the poacher clearly. He has to be his own game carrier. It behoves him then to shoot with discrimination. He is but a foolish poacher, of the amateur class at least, who loads up his bag with rabbits, when he may, later, want a place for some quarry more glorious, such as partridge or pheasant. The prudent poacher will shoot his rabbits either first or last, that is to say, presumably, at the point of his domain near his house, so that, if shot first, he may then and there put them into a secret *cache*, where he may retrieve them on his way home, or, if shot last, that in that case also he may not have too far to carry them. It is the part of the wise poacher to make up his mind before starting as to the number of rabbits he is prepared to carry on his back. So many he will shoot as he enters his preserves, or on the first opportunity thereafter, but if he cannot reach this modest limit in the first covert he tries he should think no more again of rabbit till he comes back to that home covert, where he will have laid his coneys in *cache*, trusting to make up the total when he returns to that covert. By so doing he will have far less labour than if he were to shoot rabbits throughout

his expedition, and to go with a light burden is to go with a light heart and, what is more indispensable for the immediate purpose, with a light step.

There is not much chance of a pheasant in the covert where you have set all the wild things on the watch by firing at bunnies, and this is a consideration which makes it the more advisable to shoot the rabbits in one covert only. But beyond this first covert there is a stubble in the country where we best love to go poaching. This year at least it is a stubble, and as it is the only stubble of any size for many a field round, it is a sure draw for partridges. But how to get at them, poaching, that is to say without a helper, is a puzzle. One covey is up and away as soon as one's nose is over the gate of the field. They settle in a strip of roots that lie, as if by the planting of Providence, on the far side of the stubble. Even as we go after them a little party of three rises within easy shot on the left, and from these a brace is bagged. Then for the birds on the roots. At this time of year they are like greyhounds, and despite swift and stealthy going (perhaps the lucky double shot that bagged the brace of birds alarmed them) they get up practically out of shot at a great distance from their alighting place. A wild shot, an imprudently long shot, for which instant and poignant remorse follows, is sent after them. It is one of the worst features of this amateur poaching, that the keenness to make the bag, to fill the pot, tempts one to fearful sins—to the long shot, and on the outsides, where there is not much chance of seeing him again, even to the fearful crime (it is almost too heinous to commit to writing) of shooting on the ground the wandering cock pheasant. The confession is made, and a weight seems released from the chest by the making, but it has cost pain and the shame tingles still. So after these partridges we go, to some 'rough' as the locals call it—ground of long grass, and fern covert, giving fine protection for partridges—in the hope that the birds may be there. It is on this sort of stuff, if the poacher be alone, that he may best hope to make something of a bag of partridges, for out of it the birds, if you come on them quickly after they have alighted, will rise singly, and so give you opportunities that you hardly can expect on stubble or roots. But for this once the birds are disappointing, they have missed 'the rough' and gone who shall say whither? So then the programme is, perhaps, to cross the river and go up to the big wood on the other side, where the pheasants are said, by the farmer who does the amateur keeping, as we do the amateur poaching, to be 'extraordinary.' Extra-

ordinary the pheasant is, in that wood, in the sense of being a bird that in the ordinary way you do not see. But that is not the sense in which the farmer-keeper means it. On the way down to the river a glance up to a rough field on the right shows a partridge covey, probably our old friends who were not in 'the rough,' running up at their best speed over the field. So then we squat awhile, until the birds have got their confidence, and then, crawling under cover of the fence, begin a systematic stalk. It is wonderful how trying to the wind it is, thus stalking doubled up. It sets all the pulses beating. But the lie of the ground favours the stalker, and soon we are almost within shot of the birds, when up they rise—only a single laggard, perhaps wounded before, gives a chance of a shot, and out of breath and with pulses beating we miss him badly. So now we leave this harassed covey and down to the river again. There is a moorhen here, who goes out with a great fuss and flurry as we come to the water, and him we shoot, for all is grist that comes to the mill, and the moorhen is a better bird for the pot than he gets credit for (luckily for him). Moreover, he is a shocking marauder of pheasant's food, so he is slain without a pang of remorse. Crossing the river—it is not much more than a ditch—is a work of some art, by means of a single tree stem felled to lie across it. It is of soft willow, and the water-rats have been busy gnawing it away, and making it no secure way of passing. But it is the only one and so has to serve. There is many a chance at a rabbit as we come to the big wood, but this is not the place for the rabbit slaying. The big wood is a wonderful place. Columns of great fir trees go up dark and solemn under the canopy of their dense foliage, so that it is like shooting in a cathedral, with the trunks of the great trees for columns. This is the spot beloved by the pigeons for roosting. Several go out as we come along, and of them we get one that falls in a great white cloud of feathers, feathers that keep floating down through the still air under the fir-tree canopy long after the bird has been picked and bagged. One or two come swooping over a gap between the trees as we stand motionless, and at them we make very indifferent practice. We ought to wait till they circle round again up-wind, to alight. But here the fir trees are so dense that not one bird in five that alights would you be able to see through the dark green curtain. In fact, one does come sailing in just now, as if to test the point, and settles in a tree within easy range. But it is impossible to locate the bird in the mass of foliage. Once we think we see him, and propose to 'draw a bead,' but then doubt

assails us, and a stealthy move to another point of view shows that this was not a pigeon at all, but we believe from here that we see him somewhere else. A little further study shows this too to be but a simulacrum, and we give it up again. Then it seems that the only solution is to creep somewhat nearer, and chance getting a real sight of him sitting, or else a snap shot as he flies out—the latter far more probable. But immediately he defeats both the one calculation and the other by sailing away from behind a mass of foliage that gives one not the faintest excuse for firing, and from another part altogether from either of those in which we fancied we had located him. For the present, that is all that is to be done with pigeons, which we condemn as scheming and deceitful birds. There are but two in the bag, though likely twenty have been one way or another within shot of us.

The big wood does not consist entirely of the fir-trees. If that was so it would be grand indeed, but beyond all description gloomy, and it is relieved and its beauty increased by the contrast with oaks, beeches, chestnuts, alder-bushes, spruces. There is a great variety. Here and there are patches that have been cut lately, and are still low. It is here, the farmer-keeper tells us, that the pheasants lie, but a suspicion is aroused by the word 'lie' in connection with the pheasants in this wood and the keeper's tales about them. It is a suspicion that impresses itself with ever-growing force as we walk through the wood so very stealthily, and yet see so very little game. The fact is, that there are several rights of way through all these preserves in which we are poaching. There are others, not amateur poachers like ourselves, but real professionals, who find it much to their advantage to stroll along these rights of way with hands innocently in their pockets, but a couple of lurchers, that run without tongue, ranging the coverts on each side. And what shall you say to them? Dogs are cheap. If you shoot one, another comes; and, after all, it is hateful work shooting a dog, the friend of man—far worse than the sitting cock pheasant. You cannot catch the real criminal, the dog's owner, for he will disclaim ownership at once, when he is taxed with it, and the dog is caught red-handed. You may catch the dog so, but you cannot catch the owner red-handed. So the man gets off, to buy another dog next day. It is necessary to say all this, because it is necessary to apologise in some measure for our own poaching—even in the amateurest fashion. For, even in this fashion, it would not do either in a covert in which there was any head of

game worth preserving, or in a covert in which a tolerable head of game might be preserved; but the covert being what it is, a beautiful place to roam in and yet so cut by public footways—public, and yet scarcely ever traversed except for poaching purposes—it is an ideal hunting-ground of the poacher, whether professional or amateur, being altogether beautiful, capable of holding a few wild pheasants, enough to give a little sport in this modest way, and not enough to be spoiled by this modest sporting, nor enough to give sport in any way more ambitious.

It is in the cut part—what the farmer-keeper calls the ‘short cut’—that there is best hope of finding a pheasant; and there is no knowing, of course, how many may be running through at the far end as one comes on, but within anything like shot only one gets up, and is slain in ignominious fashion *a tergo*, shot in the tail—of necessity in the tail, since it is the only part of his anatomy that he presents. A hen pheasant—the first was a cock—jumps out as we get out of the big wood, giving a better shot, for she crosses to the right, and can be killed in cleaner fashion.

So that is practically the end of it, and it is time to be working homeward. On the way, before looking in at that smaller covert, to make up the tale of rabbits, it will be as well to have a glance over the stubble-field to see what is going forward—whether coveys have come in again or any pheasants have strayed out to feed. On first appearance in the field one is aware of a sudden bobbing down of several heads. One had not seen them before they bobbed, nor are they visible any more now that the bobbing has been done. It is only the movement that betrayed them, and now we know just what it means. A little covey had been drawing together, for it is latish and near roosting-time, and suddenly squatted at the gunner’s appearance. And now there is no help to be obtained from any covert, no chance of approaching them unseen. The only hope is that as they have squatted, with the evident intention of letting themselves be passed by, and evidently in the belief that they have not been seen, so they may continue to squat in that comfortable illusion till we can edge up to them near enough to get a shot. Edging is the only chance for it. If one were to face them squarely and walk towards them, they would be off in a minute, knowing that they were sure to have to rise sooner or later, and preferring the sooner, as meaning at longer range. But if you walk as if you were going to pass them at some distance, with sideways edgings towards them now and again, which will not arouse much suspicion, then there is hope

that they may continue in the fond fancy that you are going to pass them by until it is too late for them to find safety in flight. And this is in fact what happens. Towards roosting-time the birds will rise with reluctance, and one gets an easy shot—could, indeed, had one the heart, decimate them terribly on the ground, for they are packed close. A brace, as they rise, ought to have been the bag here, but it was not, for there is something about this edging approach and sideways glance of the eye that seems to throw the eye out of gear. It feels strained, and the feeling seems to affect the shooting. The first barrel misses the bird entirely—a real bad miss; and the second, fired with a savage fury, sends one, not cleanly killed, but scuttering, down. However, the stubble is low, there is no covert, he is quickly bagged, and then on to the little plantation, where the tale of rabbits, the day's burden, is soon made up, and so it is time for home.

It may be a heavy bag for a man, but it is not a heavy day's shooting. That however is the last thing in life that we went out for. It was not a day's shooting that we went for, but a walk with a gun. And, so regarded, it has been charming; very beautiful, with opportunities of studying the ways of the wild things of the earth, with enough shooting to keep your eyes awake, and a fatigue sufficient to make you sleep sound. Also there is food for the pot, to rejoice the heart of the cook. You have had a day that accords as perfectly with the ideal of the contemplative man's recreation as any that Izaak Walton could imagine for you. You have had ample leisure to arrange your thoughts, and return with a mind at ease with itself and with your fellow-creatures. If these be not some well-spent hours, how shall we spend them well?

With the first bite of the frost the way of the amateur poacher, as of more grave transgressors, becomes hard. The wild bird and beast may sit the tamer, but against that, as a heavier weight in the balance, must be placed the resounding crackle of your foot-step on the frozen leaf and twig, though you go with never such Agag-like delicacy. And yet it is worth the going, even if but a light bag reward you. If the woodland was beautiful before, it is even more so now, when every blade and spray are frosted, and glitter like silver in the sun, or shimmer, pearly grey, in the shade. Then the walk through the woods becomes a study of phrases to express it all, study to express the inexpressible. It can be seen, perhaps it can be imagined, most certainly it cannot be expressed.

HORACE G. HUTCHINSON.

Sanctuary.

THE Reverend Grantley Molyneux hobbled down to the church for the first time for some weeks. An attack of gout, unusually severe, had kept him veritably 'tied by the leg' during the best of the June weather. Now that he was about again there were but gleams of watery sunshine to tempt him out of doors. However, the sunshine if watery was warm, and by the time the 'old vicar'—for so he loved to be called—had reached the church he was glad to enter and rest in its cool grey shadows.

From sunrise to sunset Thorpleigh Church stood open. There were no week-day services—the worthy yeomen who formed the bulk of the congregation would have looked with great suspicion on any such innovation; but none the less would they have been indignant had the church been shut.

For nearly forty years the present incumbent had ministered to the people of Thorpleigh. He was, on the whole, decidedly popular—indeed, rumour had it that in his slim youth he had been over-popular—with the fair, being in the matter of susceptibility to their attractions something of a Burns. But, unlike Burns, he attempted no explanation, no vindication of his conduct, if such were needed, and it is surprising how short-lived are rumours when there is no one to contradict them.

The old vicar had ruled his life according to the maxim given by an exceedingly wise man to a young politician, 'Never quarrel, never explain, never fear.' He found it to answer wonderfully well on the whole, and for the last ten years had placidly increased in bulk, untroubled by any enemy other than the gout.

A courteous scholarly man, of a somewhat florid old-world politeness, he seemed strangely out of place in this remote Gloucestershire village; but he suited the people, and the people suited him. Dulcis Gallio himself was not more careless of doctrine than is the average Cotteswold peasant, whose highest

praise of ‘passun’ lies in the phrase, ‘e don’t never interfere with oi.’ The old vicar never interfered, not even in so far as to appoint a curate when disabled himself by gout.

Had he worn a ruff instead of the orthodox ‘choker,’ he might have passed for one of his own Elizabethan ancestors, as he rested in the Squire’s pew, his head leaning against the high oak back.

A long face, with high narrow forehead and pointed beard, cheeks heavy and creased, straight nose, with strongly marked sensitive nostrils. The mouth full-lipped and shutting firmly under the grey moustache cut straight across the upper lip. Truly a fine old face, deeply lined and sorrowful, bearing upon it the tragic impress of great possibilities, that had remained—possibilities.

The grey coolness of the little Norman church was restful. The vicar sighed and closed his eyes—those full blue eyes that had once been bold and winsome, that were still keen. The old live mostly in the past, they are not often dull or lonely. At will they can summon a whole pageantry of love, and friendship, and eager strife. The vicar of Thorpleigh was much given to warming his hands at the fires of recollection. His memory was excellent, and he had much to remember, for he had lived strenuously. Age had not dimmed his faculties, his hearing being particularly acute.

Presently his good dream was disturbed, and he began to be annoyed by a strange little scraping noise for which he could not account.

It was almost continuous.

He leant forward and listened, frowned, then looked interested, and finally rose from his seat.

The noise ceased.

He sat down again and waited. Sure enough the sound began again, and it was for all the world like the scratch of a quill pen in the hand of a rapid writer. He decided that it came from a chapel on the right side of the altar—the chapel in which his wife was buried. A square sarcophagus stood in the centre, but there were no seats, as the chapel was quite small. Hobbling up the three steps that led to it from the body of the church, the vicar looked about him but could see nothing, and the silence was unbroken.

Suddenly it occurred to him to look over the tomb which filled the centre vacant space. What he discovered caused him to exclaim, more surprisedly than piously :

'God bless my soul!'

Seated on the floor, in the narrow space which separated the side of the tomb from the church wall, was a young man. A card blotting-book lay on his knees, a leather ink-bottle was stuck into the tracery of the tomb, and scattered round him were closely written sheets of manuscript. He looked up at the vicar's exclamation, but made no attempt to rise.

'Sir! What are you doing here?'

The vicar's voice was low, but in the 'Sir!' there was infinite rebuke.

The intruder lifted his gaunt face the better to observe his questioner. Then he pointed to the scattered papers, saying :

'It is not difficult to see.'

'But why do you write in my church?' persisted the vicar, peering over the side of the tomb at this strange sacrilegious person, with a curiosity that almost mastered his annoyance.

'Because there was nowhere else. I have done no harm to your church—besides, how is it more your church than mine?'

'Do you think you could come and converse with me in the porch upon this subject? I am old-fashioned, and your action strikes me as incongruous. Moreover, it tires me to stand.'

The young man scrambled to his feet. Laying his hands upon the tomb's flat top he vaulted lightly over, and stood beside the vicar on the wider side of the tiny chapel.

The vicar frowned, demanding :

'Would you like me to jump over your wife's grave?'

A momentary gleam of amusement lighted up the stranger's tragic black eyes as he noted the vicar's cumbrous figure and swathed foot. Then his expression changed, and he said gently :

'I beg your pardon!'

Often in these last days he had found himself wondering with a sort of tender curiosity about the *Lady Cicely Molyneux*, 'aged twenty-one years,' who had lain there so long.

When they reached the porch the vicar sat down, and, pointing to a place beside him, said :

'Sit down, and tell me what you mean when you say there is nowhere else?'

The young man obeyed, saying wearily :

'It is the simple truth. I am lodging at Eliza Heaven's, in the village, and you probably know that there is no living-room except the kitchen. I share a bed-room with three of the boys, and the rain comes down in torrents every day. I can't tramp

about the country—I only get wet through and fall ill. My holiday lasts ten days—how could I spend it better? The church was quiet; I was under cover. No one has ever come in before.'

The vicar stared silently at this strange youth clad in threadbare black, with flannel shirt open at his lean throat. He felt attracted to him in spite of his square grim jaw and Nihilistic-looking crop of thick black hair. His voice was not uncultivated, and the vicar recognised, with a little thrill of pleasure, the soft guttural 'r' which proclaimed the stranger to be Welsh. Lady Cicely was Welsh, and for her sake the vicar loved well that courteous fiery little people.

'I am sorry you should have had such a wet holiday. In fine weather the country round here is very beautiful, and you look as though long days out of doors would be better for you than literary work—anywhere.'

The young man looked rather surprised at the urbanity of this speech; but it is difficult for the Welsh to be other than courteous, even when they meet with churls. It was easy, therefore, to explain the position of affairs to this gouty but amiable old gentleman. The hunted look left the stranger's eyes, the tense lines round his mouth relaxed as he said, 'I work at a cloth factory at Stroud. One of my mates told me his mother would lodge me for my holiday—I could not afford to go home—so I came here. I am a Socialist, but my father was a Wesleyan minister. I speak at Labour meetings in Stroud—that is my next speech I was writing—it is nearly finished.'

The musical voice ceased; the vicar gave a little start; he had been gazing out on the sunlit grass in the churchyard. Then he turned and faced his new acquaintance: 'Will you let me read your speech? It would interest me greatly. It is long since I took any active interest in politics. I am glad I found you instead of Daniel Long the clerk. He would, with the best intentions in life, have been rude. I can understand your seeking sanctuary in the church, and, as you say, She belongs to all of us; but—perhaps it is prejudice—I had rather you didn't write political speeches there. Will you come and write at the vicarage instead? You shall be quite undisturbed.'

The young man cleared his throat, and when he spoke his voice was rather husky: 'How do you know I should not steal your spoons?'

'My good friend,' the vicar answered cheerfully, 'though I

know but little of politics, I know this much, that it is nothing less than my whole possessions you Socialists want. Spoons, indeed ! that's but a small part of it ; and you don't want to steal them either, but to take them, boldly and in the light of day, that every one may see and admire the redistribution—I believe that is the word—of property.'

As he spoke the vicar rose, and, leaning heavily on his stick, prepared to fare forth into the sunshine again. The little Welshman made no answer, so the vicar turned and put his hand on his shoulder, saying kindly : ' But as you write, you probably read. I have plenty of books. You must come and see them. Come now !'

' May I collect my papers, sir ? I won't be a minute.' The voice was eager, with a deference in the tone which had been lacking at first. The vicar smiled—that pleasant smile, which had won him so much goodwill. ' I like these Welshmen,' he thought to himself, ' always so much in earnest, always responsive.' Then he sighed and frowned as his gouty foot gave a warning twinge.

He and his strange acquaintance walked through the churchyard together. At the vicarage door the old man stopped, and, rubbing his hands delightedly, exclaimed, ' Now you are going to enjoy yourself.'

' I am bewildered ; Fortune is not usually kind to me,' murmured the stranger, as he followed his host into a room walled round with books. The vicar sank wearily into an armchair, while his servant arranged his gouty foot upon the rest. As the door closed behind the man, the little Welshman clasped his hands, and, standing before the vicar with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, cried breathlessly : ' Do you mean that I may take them down—handle them—read them ? '

The vicar laughed. ' Sesame,' said he, and waved his hand towards the largest bookcase.

What ' Sesame ' meant the other knew not, nor cared. It was a permission, that was enough. He held out his work-worn hands, palms upwards, to the vicar, saying simply : ' They are clean.'

The vicar leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, quoting softly, as if to himself : ' These are all at your choice; and life is short.' But the stranger did not hear him, for he found himself amidst a company ' wide as the world, multitudinous as its days, the chosen and the mighty, of every place and time.'

L. ALLEN HARKER.

'The Points of a Bank.'

NO doubt the theoretical man of business would think long and seriously before selecting one out of the many banks who are so unobtrusively anxious to take charge of his cash and credit. He would carefully compare their published balance-sheets ; he would consider their annual reports, the dividends paid, and the market price of their shares ; he would inquire into the means and standing of their directors and leading officials. The theoretical man of business would do all this and more, so that if he existed in this world of uncertainty he would probably die of brain exhaustion before he had made a definite and unchallengeable choice. The practical man—the average man who hurrahs for war and grumbles at the income-tax—in the majority of cases makes no conscious choice ; he optimistically disregards all statistics, and goes to the bank which is nearest or to that in which he has most personal friends. Haphazard though his method of selection may seem, there is more to be said in its favour than he could advance if challenged. In the matter of security all the large English banks are beyond cavil. A man may safely entrust his money to any one of them with the assurance that nothing but great national disaster can come between him and his own. Neither bad trade, fire, fraud, nor violence will affect it. In spite of any or all of these he will receive it back when, and in what form, he requires it. It is difficult for us at the present day to realise how great a boon to the prudent are the security and accessibility of the English banks. The curious may be referred to the *Diary* of Mr. Samuel Pepys ; wherein may be read the sufferings of that thrifty gallant gentleman in his pathetic search for a safe investment. ‘Lord,’ he says, ‘the trouble that it puts a man to, to keep safe what with pain a man hath been getting together !’ Mr. Pepys lent his money to private persons, and to the goldsmiths—only to be harassed with doubts as to whether it would ever be repaid. He put it in a waistbelt, and in an iron chest—and was haunted by the dread of

robbery and violence. He buried it in his garden—and dug it up damaged and diminished, nor could the missing coins be recovered by the most assiduous use of spade and riddle. Had Mr. Pepys enjoyed the business facilities of our own time, none of these troubles need have come near him. Before he had amassed enough gold to tempt a robber, he might have walked into the first bank that he happened to come across, with all but absolute confidence that his money might safely be left there to bring him in a small revenue, and to return to him undiminished whenever he might chance to require it.

Some banks, it is true, have larger reserves than others, but practically, from a depositor's point of view, there is little to choose between them. The margin is in all cases so much more than adequate that comparison is unnecessary. If there is little to choose in the matter of safety, the banks also differ little as regards their charges—interest and commission. Throughout the country there are many methods of computation in use, and widely different rates, but in any one district the banks are as nearly as possible uniform in this matter. Probably the few private banks still remaining preserve more of their own individuality; in many ways they seem to hold aloof from the uniformity of practice attained by the joint-stock banks. The fads and fancies of a senior partner may outweigh all the rulings of the Institute of Bankers. A well-to-do solicitor, having dealt for many years with Brown, Jones, & Robinson's Bank, applied for a temporary advance of one thousand pounds against leasehold property worth about eighteen hundred pounds. He was interviewed by Mr. Brown, who had ruled the counsels of the bank for nearly fifty years. With many apologies, Mr. Brown 'could not see his way to making the advance.' The solicitor, surprised, inquired if the security was deemed of insufficient value. 'Oh dear no. Mr. Brown thought it worth much more than the amount required.' Then what possible reason was there for refusing the advance? Mr. Brown rubbed his hands and regretted that 'it was not the practice of his bank to advance upon securities of that nature. Their experience had been very unfortunate; they had had many losses.' The solicitor asked how it would be possible to make a loss in this case, where the value of the security was so much more than the loan required; but Mr. Brown begged him not to argue the point, as 'the practice of the bank could not be varied.' The would-be borrower protested indignantly against the inconvenience that he must suffer to preserve the inviolability

of the bank's customs, and Mr. Brown hastened to explain. They could not advance against the security tendered, but they would be very pleased to grant the overdraft *without* security ! When the solicitor recovered his breath he accepted the offer, and the transaction was carried through. Being a cautious man, the borrower refrained from asking (as he longed to do) through what strange experiences the bank had come to the conclusion that it was safer to advance money without security than with it.

However, private banks are now so few in number that their occasional eccentricities require no more than a passing word.

In country districts the less sophisticated depositors attach much importance to the character and personality of the local manager. A small cattle dealer was heard to say: ' You're safe with the old bank. The manager's passed our door as reg'lar as reg'lar every morning this seven years, so I know he won't make away with the money.' Absurd as it may seem, the bank is often regarded as the private property of the manager in charge. A small branch of one of the largest joint-stock banks, situate in an agricultural district, is widely known as ' Mester Smith's Bank,' ' Mester ' Smith being the local manager. Two or three years ago another branch of the same bank was opened at a distance of a few miles, under the management of a Mr. Brown. The rustic wiseacres shook their heads, telling one another that ' Mester ' Brown's bank was not so safe as ' Mester ' Smith's. ' Mester ' Smith was a man of substance ; he rode to the bank in his own dogcart, while ' Mester ' Brown walked. Getting an inkling of the truth, Brown inscribed on his plateglass windows, in huge gilt characters, ' Established 1802. Capital 10,000,000*l.*' Every one who passed stopped to read, and the opinion of the village was epitomised by an old farmer. ' Established 1802 ! Why the chap 'asn't been 'ere six months ! ' The statement ' Capital 10,000,000*l.*' conveyed no meaning, and was merely ignored.

Rural customers also attach great importance to the bank's outward appearance. A thrifty tradesman having opened a deposit account with a bank distant some thirty miles from his home, the cashier had the curiosity to ask why he travelled so far when there was a branch of the same bank almost at his door. The depositor smiled knowingly, and replied : ' I lodged opposite here all the time while this bank was being built, so I know it's safe.' Balance-sheets to the rustic are a meaningless and arbitrary arrangement of figures ; iron bars he understands.

In a northern city there is a bank widely known for the artistic

merit of its doors. Designed by an eminent sculptor, they are executed in relief in copper or bronze, and appear to represent tableaux from *Æsop's Fables* and Greek history. About a week after they were unveiled an old man, who had been a depositor for many years, withdrew his balance and took it to a rival bank almost opposite. Questioned as to his reason for changing, he replied : 'I don't hold wi' them doors of theirs. Punched tin ain't business like, and it ain't safe.'

Architects and bank directors might well pay more attention to the prejudices of the ignorant, which, after all, are not without some basis of reason. A bank should convey to every one who looks at it an impression of permanence and security. The old heavy stone pillars and rigid iron bars compare very favourably with the modern terra-cotta peaks and pinnacles—the stained-glass windows protected by contorted iron foliage.

There is a little country bank of grey monastic stone ; its roof is of green tiles, its windows tall and narrow, with small leaded panes. It cost its owners a great deal of money, and they are very proud of it, yet it was convincingly criticised by a tiny child. Entering with her mother, she looked appraisingly about, and then remarked 'O mother ! What a funny church !'

There is no evading the criticism of children. A little boy, having watched his mother exchanging meaningless papers for uninteresting coins, cast a disparaging look round the bank and said : 'Come along, mother, let's go to a shop where we can *buy* something.' The scornful intonation of the 'buy' was unforgettable.

It is not only the rustic who is influenced by outward show ; an increase of business almost invariably follows upon a rebuilding or enlargement of bank premises, even in the big trade centres where men might be expected to pay more attention to balance-sheets than to building materials. Partly, no doubt, it is due to the tyranny of advertisement, unconsciously deferred to. There are some useful hints to bank directors and to their customers in Charles Dickens's description of the founding of the 'Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company' in *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

'The Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company started into existence one morning in the City, resplendent in stucco and plateglass, with wire blinds in all the windows, and "Anglo-Bengalee" worked into the pattern of every one of them. On the door-post was painted again "Offices of the Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company," and on the door

was a large brass plate with the same inscription. Within, the offices were newly plastered, newly painted, newly papered, newly countered, newly florclothed, newly tabled, newly chaired, newly fitted up in every way, with goods that were substantial and expensive, and designed (like the company) to last. Business! Look at the ledgers, court-guides, directories, day-books, almanacs, letter-boxes, weighing machines for letters, rows of fire-buckets for dashing out a conflagration in its first spark and saving the immense wealth in notes and bonds belonging to the company; look at the iron safes, the clock, the office seal. Security! Look at the massive blocks of marble in the chimney-pieces, and the gorgeous parapet on the top of the house! Publicity! Why, Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company is painted on the very coal-scuttles. It is repeated at every turn, until the eyes are dazzled with it and the head is giddy. It is engraved upon the top of all the letter paper, and it makes a scroll-work round the seal, and it shines out of the porter's buttons.'

It is not only in fiction that expensive reiteration inspires confidence. The branch banks which have recently sprung up in every suburb are of considerable value to the banks they represent simply as advertisements. Men are apt to gauge the quantity of a bank's business by the number of its branches—a very misleading test. A great many of the smaller branches fail to make their working expenses, and yet it is very seldom that a branch bank is abandoned. The fear of losing a valuable connection often drives a bank to open branches which it knows cannot be directly remunerative. An important customer points out that a rival bank is opening a branch near his residence, and that he thinks it will be convenient to keep his private account there. Of course he has no intention of transferring his business accounts, and the private account is of little value; but the bank knows well that sooner or later the customer will find it inconvenient to deal with two bankers, and if his dealings are sufficiently large to justify the step, a second branch bank appears in a place which could barely support one. There are, however, several ways in which small branches are indirectly remunerative. As may be surmised from what has just been said, they open up new connections, obtaining small accounts which may be used as levers to move very much larger business, either to the branch or to its head office. Moreover, a small branch is at once a nursery and a school for small customers. A man unused to the intricacies of modern business goes into a busy city bank to deposit his savings. He is given a

printed form and told to 'fill that up.' He turns it over and over and wonders what it means; the hurry and the noise confuse him, the cashier is too busy to listen or explain. Before his money is lodged he regrets that he ever came in, and only shame prevents him pocketing his cash and walking out again. Let the same man go to a suburban branch, and it is ten chances to one that he will find a cashier with the experience to understand his difficulties and the leisure and will to remove them. Every new account appreciably improves the position of a small branch, and the manager will grudge neither time nor trouble to obtain one. The customer feels that he and his money are welcome; he signs his name laboriously but cheerfully wherever the cashier directs, and departs well satisfied with himself and his banker. He returns to make further deposits, and is gradually initiated into the use of the cheque book—an awful mystery to the ignorant. In course of time his knowledge and transactions increase until he keeps an active current account, and the branch manager has the satisfaction of knowing that he has made a remunerative addition to the customers of his bank.

The individual attention that every customer receives in a small branch is a point which the public would do well to note. In a busy city office the private accounts and the smaller business accounts are merely book entries in the eyes of the manager. He is too much occupied with high finance to consider minutely the means and character of small tradesmen. A shopkeeper, perhaps, temporarily embarrassed by a delayed payment, applies at a busy office for a loan of fifteen or twenty pounds for a week. He is promptly refused—the transaction is of no value to the bank, and carries with it a possibility of loss. Let the same application be made to a small branch bank. The manager will give the matter careful consideration, and if the account has been satisfactorily conducted in all probability the loan will be granted. The failure or success of many a shopkeeper has hinged upon the bank manager's 'yes' or 'no'; and in a small branch it is seldom indeed that the answer is given lightly or capriciously. A business man who requires large loans at short notice will save time and trouble by dealing at a head office; but almost every one else—particularly professional men, tradesmen, and ladies—will be better and more pleasantly served at a small branch.

However, the reasons which lead a person to prefer one bank to another do not always appear on the surface. A very sedate-looking man was in the habit of getting change from a

suburban branch, while his account was kept at the town office of the same bank, some miles away. When this had gone on for two or three years, the branch manager asked if he would not like the account to be transferred. The customer shook his head solemnly. 'Thank you kindly,' he said; 'but I won't do that so long as my old girl's alive. It's the only excuse I have now for going into town; and she do think the bank's open all hours!'

GEORGE GRAYSON.

The Gold-stealers.

A STORY OF WADDY.

BY EDWARD DYSON,

AUTHOR OF 'RHYMES FROM THE MINES,' AND 'BELOW AND ON TOP.'

CHAPTER I.

THE schoolhouse at Waddy was not in the least like any of the trim State buildings that now decorate every Victorian township and mark every mining or agricultural centre that can scrape together two or three meagre classes ; it was the result of a purely local enthusiasm, and was erected by public subscription shortly after Mr. Joel Ham, B.A., arrived in the district and let it be understood that he did not intend to go away again. Having discovered that it was impossible to make anything else of Mr. Joel Ham, Waddy resolved to make a schoolmaster of him. A meeting was held in the Drovers' Arms, numerous speeches, all much more eloquently expressive of the urgent need of convenient scholastic institutions than the orators imagined, were delivered by representative men, and a resolution embodying the determination of the residents to erect a substantial building and install Mr. J. Ham, B.A., as headmaster was carried unanimously.

The original contributors were not expected to donate money towards the good cause ; they gave labour and material, and the work of erection was commenced next day. Neither plans nor specifications were supplied, and every contributor was his own architect. Timber of all sorts and shapes came in from fifty sources. The men of the day shift at the mines worked at the building in the evening ; those on the four-o'clock shift put in an

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hour or two in the morning, and mates off the night shift lent a hand at any time during the day, one man taking up the work where the other left off. Consequently—and as there was no ruling mind and no general design—the Waddy school when finished seemed to lack continuity, so to speak. As an architectural effort it displayed evidence of many excellent intentions, but could not be called a brilliant success as a whole—although one astute Parliamentary candidate did secure an overwhelming majority of votes in Waddy after declaring the schoolhouse to be an ornament to the township. The public-spirited persons who contributed windows, it was tacitly agreed, were quite justified in putting in those windows according to the dictates of their own fancy, even if the result was somewhat *bizarre*. Jock Summers gave a bell hung in a small gilded dome, and this was fixed on the roof right in the centre of the building, mainly for picturesque effect; but as there was no rope attached and no means of reaching the bell—and it never occurred to anybody to rectify the deficiency—Jock's gift remained to the end merely an ornamental adjunct. So also with Sam Brierly's Gothic portico. Sam expended much time and ingenuity in constructing the portico, and it was built on to the street end of the schoolhouse, although there was no door there, the only entrance being at the back.

The building was opened with a tea-fight and a dance, and it answered its purpose very well up to the time of the first heavy rains; then studies had to be postponed indefinitely for the reason that the schoolhouse floor was a foot under water. A call was made upon the united strength of Waddy, and the building was lifted bodily and set down again on piles. When the open space between the ground and the floor was boarded up, the residents were delighted to find that the increased height had given the structure quite an imposing appearance. Alas! before six months had passed the place was found to be going over on one side. Waddy watched this failing with growing uneasiness. When the collapse seemed inevitable, the male adults were again bidden to an onerous public duty; they rolled up like patriots, and with a mighty effort pushed the school up into the perpendicular, propping it there with stout stays. That answered excellently for a time, but eventually the wretched house began to slant in the opposite direction. Once more the men of Waddy attended in force, and spent an arduous half-day hoisting it into an upright position, and securing it there with

more stays. It took the eccentric building a long time to decide upon its next move; then it suddenly lurched forward a foot or more, and after that slipped an inch or two farther out of plumb every day. But the ingenuity of Waddy was not exhausted: a few hundred feet of rope and a winch were borrowed from the Peep o' Day; the rope was run round the schoolhouse, and the building was promptly hauled back into shape and fastened down with long timbers running from its sides to a convenient red-gum stump at the back. Thus the Waddy schoolhouse appears at the opening of our story, and so it remained for many years, bulging at the sides, pitching forward, and straining at its tethers like an eager hound in a leash.

It was literally a humming hot day at Waddy; the pulsing whirr of invisible locusts filled the whole air with a drowsy hum, and from the flat at the back of the township, where a few thousand ewes and lambs were shepherded amongst the quarry holes, came another insistent droning in a deeper note, like the murmur of distant surf. No one was stirring in Waddy: to the right and left along its single thin wavering line of unpainted weatherworn wooden houses nothing moved but mirage waters flickering in the hollows of the ironstone road. Equally deserted was the wide stretch of brown plain across the dull expanse of which Waddy seemed to peer with stupid eyes, like a lost legion. The plain was dotted with poppet legs and here and there a whim, but to-day desolation brooded over all.

From within the school were heard alternately, with the regularity of a mill, the piping of an old cracked voice and the brave chanting of a childish chorus. Under the school, where the light was dim and the air was decidedly musty, two small boys were crouched, playing a silent game of 'stag knife.' Besides being dark and evil-smelling under there, it was damp; great clammy masses of cobweb hung from the joists and spanned the spaces between the piles. The place was haunted by strange and fearsome insects, too, and the moving of the classes above sent showers of dust down between the cracks in the worn floor. But those boys were satisfied that they were having a perfectly blissful time, and were serenely happy in defiance of their unpropitious surroundings. They were 'playing the wag,' and to be playing the wag under any circumstances is a guarantee of pure felicity to the average healthy boy.

Probably the excessive heat had suggested to Dick Haddon the advisability of spending the afternoon under the school instead

of within the close crowded room ; at any rate he suggested it to Jacker McKnight, commonly known as Jacker Mack, and now after an hour of it the boys were still jubilant. The game had to be played with great caution, and conversation was conducted in whispers when ideas could not be conveyed in dumb show. All that was going on in the room above was distinctly audible to the deserters below, and the joy of camping there out of the reach of Joel Ham, B.A., and beyond all the trials and tribulations of the Higher Fifth, and hearing other fellows being tested, and hectored, and caned, was too tremendous for whisperings, and must be expressed in wild rollings and contortions and convulsive kicking.

‘ Parrot Cann, will you kindly favour me with a few minutes on the floor ?’

It was the old cracked voice, flavoured with an ominous irony. Dick paused in the middle of a throw with a cocked ear and upturned eyes ; Jacker Mack grinned all across his broad face and winked meaningly. They heard the shuffling of a pair of heavily shod feet, and then the voice again.

‘ Parrot, my man, you are a comedian by instinct, and will probably live to be an ornament to the theatrical profession ; but it is my duty to repress premature manifestations of your genius. Parrot, hold out !’

They heard the swish of the cane and the schoolmaster’s sarcastic comments between the strokes.

‘ Ah-h, that was a beauty ! Once more, Parrot, my friend, if you please. Excellent ! Excellent ! We will try again. Practice of this kind makes for perfection, you know, Parrot. Good, good—very good ! If you should be spoiled in the making, Parrot, you will not in your old age ascribe it to any paltry desire on my part to spare the rod, will you, Parrot ?’

‘ S’help me, I won’t, sir !’

There was such a world of pathos in the wail with which Parrot replied that Dick choked in his efforts to repress his emotions. The lads heard the victim blubbing, and pictured his humorous contortions after every cut—for Parrot was weirdly and wonderfully gymnastic under punishment—and Jacker hugged himself and kicked ecstatically, and young Haddon bowed his forehead in the dirt and drummed with his toes, and gave expression to his exuberant hilarity in frantic pantomime. The rough and ready schoolboy is very near to the beginnings ; his sense of humour has not been impaired by over-refinement, but

remains somewhat akin to that of the gentle savage ; and although his disposition to laugh at the misfortunes of his best friends may be deplorable from various points of view, it has not been without its influence in fashioning those good men who put on a brave face in the teeth of tribulation.

'Gee-rusalem ! ain't Jo got a thirst ?' whispered Dick when the spasm had passed.

'My oath, ain't he !' replied Jacker, 'but he was drunk up afore twelve.'

It is necessary to explain here that the school committee, in electing Mr. Ham to the position of schoolmaster, compelled him to sign a formal agreement, drawn up in quaint legal gibberish, in which it was specified that 'the herein afore-mentioned Joel Ham, B.A.,' was to be limited to a certain amount of alcoholic refreshment per diem, and McMahon, at the Drovers' Arms, bound himself over to supply no more than the prescribed quantity ; but it was understood that this galling restriction did not apply to Mr. Ham on Saturdays and holidays.

The noises above subsided into the usual school drone, and the boys under the floor resumed their game. It was an extremely interesting game, closely contested. Each player watched the other's actions with an alert and suspicious eye, and this want of confidence led directly to the boys' undoing ; for presently Dick detected Jacker in an attempt to deceive, and signalled 'Down !' with an emphatic gesture. 'Gerrout !' was the word framed by the lips of the indignant Jacker. Haddon gesticulated an angry protest, and McKnight's gestures and grimaces were intended to convey a wish that he might be visited with unspeakable pains and penalties if he were not an entirely virtuous and grievously misjudged small boy.

'It's a lie,' hissed Dick ; 'it *was* down !'

'You're another—it wasn't !'

'Twas, I tell you !'

'Twasn't !'

'Gimme my knife ; I don't play with sharps an' sneaks.'

'Won't !'

'Gimme it !'

All caution had been forgotten by this time, voices were shrill, and eyes spoke of battle. Dick made at Jacker with a threatening fist, and Jacker, with an adroitness for which he was famous, met him with a clip on the shin from a copper-toed boot. Then

the lads grappled and commenced a vigorous and enthusiastic battle in the dirt and amongst the cobweb curtains.

In the schoolroom above Joel Ham, startled from a dreamy drowsiness, heard with wonder fierce voices under his feet, the sounds of blows and of bumping heads, and saw his scholars all distracted. The master divined the truth in a very few minutes.

'Cann, Peterson, Moonlight,' he called, 'follow me.'

He selected a favourite cane from the rack, and strutted out with the curious boys at his heels.

'Now then, Peterson,' he said, and he paused with artful pre-occupation to double his cane over and under, and critically examine the end thereof, 'you are a very observant youth, Peterson; you will tell me how those boys got under the school.'

'Dunno,' said Peterson, assuming the expression of an aged cow.

The master seized him by the collar.

'Peterson, you have the faculty of divination. I give you till I have counted ten to exert it. I am counting, Peterson.'

Very often the schoolmaster's language was Greek to the scholars, but his meaning was never in doubt for a moment.

'Eight, Peterson, nine.'

Peterson slouched along a few yards, and kicked stupidly and resentfully at a loose board.

'Might a got in there,' he growled. 'Why couldn't you a asked Moonlight?—he don' mind bein' a sneak.'

But Mr. Ham was down on his knees removing the loose board, and for two or three minutes after he crouched at the opening like a famished yellow cat at a rat-hole, awaiting his opportunity. Meanwhile the fight under the school was being prosecuted with unabated fury. Dick and Jacker gripped like twin bull-terriers, rolling and tumbling about in the confined space, careless of everything but the important business in hand. Suddenly Mr. Ham made his spring, and a smart haul brought a leg to light. Another tug and a second leg shot forth.

'Pull, boys!' he cried.

Moonlight seized the other limb, and a good tug brought the two boys out into the open, still fighting enthusiastically and apparently oblivious of their surroundings. Two soldier ants never fought with greater determination or with such a whole-souled devotion to the cause. Over and over they tumbled in the dust, clutching hair, hammering ribs, and grunting and grasping, blind, deaf, and callous as logs; and Joel Ham stood above them

with the familiar cynical twist on his blotched visage, twisting his cane, and making audible comments, but offering no further interference.

'After you, my boys—after you. There is no hurry, Haddon, I can wait as you are so busy. McKnight, your future is assured. The prize ring is your sphere: there wealth and glory await you. Peterson, you see here how degraded that boy becomes who forgets those higher principles which it is my earnest effort to instill into the hearts and minds of the boys of this depraved township. Cann, my boy, behold how brutalising is ungoverned instinct.'

But, wearying of the contest, the master made a sudden descent upon Jacker, and tore him from his enemy's grasp. The effort brought Dick to his feet, panting and still eager for the fray. He could not see an inch beyond his nose, and for a few moments moved about fiercely, feeling for his foe.

'D'you gimme best?' he spluttered. 'If you don't, come on—I ain't done up!' Then he flung the curtain of cobweb from his eyes, and the situation flashed upon him in all its grim significance. For a swift moment he thought of flight, but the master's grip was on his collar.

'Blowed if it ain't Jo,' he murmured in his consternation, and yielded meekly, like one for whom Fate had proved too strong.

The schoolmaster's white-lashed eyelids blinked rapidly for a second or so, and he screwed his face into a hard wrinkled grin of gratification.

'Yes, Ginger, my lad,' he said genially, 'Jo, at your service—very much at your service; and yours, McKnight. We will go inside now, boys. The sun is painfully hot, and you are fatigued.'

Mr. Ham marched his captives before him into the schoolroom and ranged them against the wall, under the wide-open wondering eyes of the scholars, by whom even the most trifling incident of rebellion was always welcomed with glee as a break in the dull monotony of Joel Ham's peculiar system. But this was no trifling incident, it was a tremendous outrage and a delightful mystery; for the boys as they stood there presented to the amazed classes a strange and amazing spectacle, and were clothed in an original and, so far as the children were concerned, an inexplicable disguise. Fighting and tumbling about under the schoolhouse, Haddon and McKnight had gathered much mud, but more cobwebs. In fact, they had wiped up so many webs that they were covered from head to foot in the clammy dusty masses. Their hats were lost early in the encounter, and their hair was full of

cobwebs ; sticky curtains of cobweb hung about their faces, and swathed them from top to toe in what looked like a dirty grey fur. Each boy had cleared his eyes of the thick veil, but so inhuman and unheard of was their appearance that there was presently a suspicion amongst the scholars that the master had captured two previously unknown specimens of the animal kingdom, and consequently further astonishing developments might be looked for.

CHAPTER II.

MR. HAM, with wise forethought, carefully locked the door and pocketed the key after disposing of the lads ; and this was well, for Dick Haddon, fully appreciating the possibilities of the situation, was already plotting—plotting with every faculty of an active and inventive mind.

The master faced his prisoners, and stood musing over them like a pensive but kindly cormorant. Mr. Joel Ham, B.A., was a small thin man with a deceitful appearance of weakness. There was a peculiar indecision about all his joints that made the certainty of his spring and the vigour of his grip matters of wonder to all those new boys who ventured to presume upon his seeming infirmities. He had a scraggy red neck, a long beak-like nose, and queer slate-coloured eyes with pale lashes ; his hair was thin and very fine in colour and texture, strangely like that of a yellow cat ; and face, neck, and nose were mottled with patches of small purple veins. To-day he was dressed in a long seedy black coat, a short seedy black vest, and a pair of new moleskins, glaringly white, and much too long and too large.

'Haddon,' said the master in a reflective tone, 'you are not looking as neat as usual. You need dusting. I will perform that kind office presently, and, believe me, I will do it well. Jacker, I intend to leave you standing here for a few moments to cool. You may have noticed, boys, that the youthful form when over-heated or possessed with unusual excitement has not that poignant susceptibility which might be thought necessary to the adequate appreciation of a judicious lambasting. Has that ever occurred to you, McKnight ?'

Jacker shifted his feet uneasily, rolled his body, and, knowing that nothing could aggravate his offence, answered sullenly :

'Oh, dry up !'

Mr. Ham grinned at the boy in silence for a few moments, and then returned to his high stool and desk. Mr. Ham never made the slightest effort to maintain before his scholars that dignity which is supposed to be essential to the success of a pedagogue. In addressing the boys he used their correct names, or the nicknames liberally bestowed upon them by their mates, indiscriminately, and showed no resentment whatever when he heard himself alluded to as Jo, or Hamlet, or the Beetle, his most frequent appellations in the playground. He kept a black bottle in his desk, at the neck of which he habitually refreshed himself before the whole school ; and he addressed the children with an elaborate and caustic levity in a thin shaky voice quite twenty years too old for him. His humour was thrown away upon the rising generation of Waddy, and might have been supposed to be the cat-like pawing of a vicious mind ; but Joel Ham was not cruel, and although when occasion demanded he could use the cane with exceeding smartness, he frequently overlooked misdemeanours that might have justified an attack, and was never betrayed into administering unmerited cuts even when his black bottle was empty and his thirst most virulent.

In spite of his eccentricities and his weaknesses, and the fact that he was neither respected nor dreaded, Ham brought his scholars on remarkably well. There were three big classes in the room—first, third, and fifth—and a higher and lower branch of each ; he managed all, with the assistance of occasional monitors selected from the best pupils. Good order prevailed in the school, for little that went on there escaped the master's alert eye. Even when he drowsed at his desk, as he sometimes did on warm afternoons, the work was not delayed, for he was known to have a trick of awakening with a jerk, and smartly nailing a culprit or a dawdler.

The school to-day was in a tense and excitable condition, now heightened to fever by the two cobwebbed mysteries standing against the wall, but the imperative rattle of Joel's cane on the desk quickly induced a specious show of industry.

'Gable !'

The individual addressed, a big fair-haired scholar in the Lower Third, was so absorbed in the spectacle provided by Haddon and McKnight that he failed to hear the master's voice, and continued staring stupidly with all his eyes.

'Gable ! This way, my dear child.'

Gable started guiltily, and then fell into confusion. He climbed awkwardly out of his seat, and advanced hesitatingly with shuffling feet towards the master. It was now evident that Gable was not a large boy, but a little old man, slightly built, with a round ruddy clean-shaven face and thick white hair. But his manner was that of a boy of eight.

‘Hold out, my young friend !’ Joel commanded, with an expressive flourish of his cane.

Gable held out his hand, his toothless mouth formed itself into a dark oval, his eyes distended with painful expectancy, and he assumed the shrinking attitude of the very small boy who expects the fall of the cane. The situation was most absurd, but no one smiled. Ham raised the extended hand a little with the end of the dreaded weapon.

‘You are going the right way to come to a dishonoured old age, Gable,’ he said, and the cane went up, but the cut was not delivered. ‘There,’ continued the master, ‘I forgive you in consideration of your extreme youth. Go to your place, and try to set a better example to the older boys.’

The old man trotted back to his seat, grinning all over his face, and set to work at his book with an appearance of intense zeal ; and Joel Ham turned his attention to the prime culprits. Having marched the youngsters from the front desk of the third class, he drew desk and form forward into the middle of the clear space, and then beckoned to McKnight.

‘Jacker, my man,’ he said cheerfully, ‘bring your slate and sit here. I have a little job for you.’

Dick, standing alone, watched his mate seat himself at the desk, elated for a moment with the idea that perhaps Joe was not going to regard their offence as particularly heinous after all ; but his better judgment scouted the idea, and he returned to his scrutiny of the wall. There was a weak spot near where Hector, Peterson’s billy-goat, had butted his way through on a memorable occasion, and escape was still a comforting contingency.

The master approached McKnight with a pencil as if to set a lesson, but this was merely a ruse ; Jacker was a hard-headed vicious youth whose favourite kick Ham wisely reckoned with on an occasion like this. To the boy’s surprise and disgust he was presently seized by the neck and hauled forward on to the desk. His legs, being against the seat, which was attached to the desk, were quite useless for defence, and, held so, Jacker was a helpless victim under the chastening rod. It was a degrading attitude,

and the presence of the girls made the punishment a disgrace to rattle and burn. Jacker, for pride and the credit of his boyhood, made no sound under the first dozen cuts; but his younger brother Ted, from his place in the Lower Fifth, set up a lugubrious wail of sympathy almost immediately, and, as his feelings were more and more wrought upon by the painful sight, his wailing developed into shrill and tearful abuse of the master.

' You let him alone, see ! ' yelled Ted, when Jacker, unable longer to contain himself, uttered a dismal cry.

' Hit some one yer size—go on, hit some one yer size ! ' screamed Ted.

But Mr. Ham's whole attention was devoted to his task, and the younger McKnight's threats, commands, and warnings were entirely ignored, although the boy continued to utter them between his heartbroken sobs.

' Mind who you're hittin' ! You'll suffer for this, Hamlet, you'll see ! We'll get some one what'll show you ! Rocks for you nex' Saterdee ! '

Ted howled, Jacker howled, but the master caned on until he thought he had quite accomplished his duty in that particular ; then he let the limp youth slide back into his seat.

Mr. Ham returned to his high stool to rest and recuperate. Throughout the proceedings he had displayed no heat whatever, and when he addressed Jacker it was with his usual bland irony.

' You should thank me for my pains, my boy, but youth is proverbially ungrateful. You will think better of my efforts a few years hence ; meanwhile I can afford to wait for the verdict of your riper judgment, Jacker—I can afford to wait, my boy.'

Jacker's only reply to this was a long wail expressive of a great disgust. That outburst was too much for the already overwrought youngster in the Lower Fifth : starting up with a cry, Ted snatched one of the leaden ink-wells from its cell in the desk, and took aim at the master's head. The well struck the wall just above its mark, and scattered its contents in Joel Ham's pale hair, in his eyes, down his cheeks, and all over his white moles. Amazement—blind, round-eyed, dumb amazement—possessed the school, and for a few seconds a dead silence prevailed. The spell was broken by Dick Haddon, who discovered his opportunity, plunged like a diver at the weak spot in the wall, went clean through and disappeared from view. Ted McKnight, who had awakened to the enormity of his crime at the sight of the master knuckling the ink out of his eyes, and had gone grey to the lips

in his trepidation, looking anxiously to the right and left for a refuge, saw Dickie's departure; jumping the desk in front he rushed at the aperture the latter had left in the wall, and was gone in the twinkling of an eye.

The master mopped the ink from his hair and his face with a sheet of blotting paper, and calling Belman, Cann, Peterson, Jinks, and Slogan, made for the door. Already Dick Haddon was halfway across the flat, scattering the browsing sheep to the right and left in his flight, and Ted was following at his best pace.

'After them!' cried the master. 'Two whole days' holiday for you if you run them down.'

The pursuit was taken up cheerfully enough, but it was quite hopeless. The breakaways were heading for the line of bush, and the sapling scrub along the creek was so thick that the boys would have been perfectly secure under its cover, even if the pursuers were not in hearty sympathy with the pursued, and the pursuit were not a miserable and perfidious pretence.

Mr. Ham, recognising after a few minutes how matters really stood, returned to the school. His approach had been signalled by a scout at one of the windows, and he found the classes all in order and suspiciously industrious, and Jacker McKnight still sitting with his head sunk upon his arms—a monument of sturdy resentment.

'My dears,' said the master, looking ludicrously piebald after his ink bath, 'before resuming duties I wish to draw your attention to the crass foolishness of which our young friends Haddon and McKnight are guilty. You perceive that their action is not diplomatic, eh?'

'Ye—yes, sir,' piped a dubious voice here and there.

'To be sure. Had they remained they would have been caned; as they have run away, they will receive a double dose and certain extra pains and penalties, and meanwhile they suffer the poignant pangs of anticipation. Anticipation, Jacker, my boy, the smart of future punishments, is the true hell-flame.'

Jacker replied with a grunt of derisive and implacable bitterness, but the schoolmaster seemed much comforted by his apophthegm, and stood for several minutes surveying the back of McKnight's head, and wearing a benignant and thoughtful smile.

CHAPTER III.

WADDY was soon possessed of the facts of the shameful acts of insubordination at the school and the escape of Dick Haddon and Ted McKnight, and nobody--according to everybody's wise assurances--was the least bit surprised. The fathers of the township (and the mothers, too) had long since given Dick up as an irresponsible and irreclaimable imp. One large section declared the boy to be 'a bit gone,' which was generally Waddy's simple and satisfactory method of accounting for any attribute of man, woman, or child not in conformity with the dull rule of conduct prevailing at Waddy. Another section persisted in its belief that 'the boy Haddon' was possessed with several peculiar devils of lawlessness and unrest, which could only be exorcised by means of daily 'hidings,' long abstinence from any diet more inflammatory than bread and water, and the continuous acquisition of great quantities of Scripture.

An extraordinary meeting of the School Committee was held at the Drovers' Arms that evening to confer with Joel Ham, B.A., and consider what was best to be done under the circumstances. The men of the township recognised that it was their bounden duty to support the master in an affair of this kind. When occasion arose they assisted in the capture of vagrant youths, and when Joel imagined a display of force advisable they attended at the punishment and rendered such assistance as was needful in the due enforcement of discipline. It was understood by all that the school would lose prestige and efficiency if Haddon and McKnight were not taken and at once subjected to the rules of the establishment and the rod of the master.

The meeting was quite informal. It was held in the bar, and the discussion of the vital matter in hand was concurrent with the absorption of McMahon's beer. Mr. Ham's best attention was given to the latter object.

'Bring the boys to me, gentlemen,' he said, 'and I will undertake to induce in them a wholesome contrition and a proper respect for letters—temporarily, at least.'

Neither of the lads had yet returned to his home; but the paternal McKnight promised, like a good citizen, that immediately his son was available he would be reduced to subjection with a length of belting, and then handed over to the will of the scholastic authority without any reservation. Mr. McKnight was

commended for his public spirit ; and it was then agreed that a member of the Committee should wait upon Widow Haddon to invite her co-operation, and point out the extent to which her son's mental and moral development would be retarded by a display of weakness on her part at a crisis of this kind.

Mr. Ephraim Shine volunteered for this duty. Ephraim was a tall gaunt man, with hollow cheeks, a leathery complexion, and large feet. He walked or sat with his eyes continually fixed upon these feet—reproachfully, it seemed—as if their disproportion were a source of perennial woe ; he carried his arms looped behind him, and had acquired a peculiar stoop—to facilitate his vigilant guardianship of his feet, apparently. Mr. Shine, as superintendent of the Waddy Wesleyan Chapel, represented a party that had long since broken away from the School Committee, which was condemned in prayer as licentious and ungodly, and left to its wickedness when it exhibited a determination to stand by Joel Ham, a scoffer and a drinker of strong drinks, as against a respectable, if comparatively unlettered, nominee of the Chapel and the Band of Hope. His presence at the committee meeting to-night was noted with surprise, although it excited no remark ; and his offer to interview the widow was accepted with gratitude as a patriotic proposal. There was only one dissentient—Rogers, a burly faceman from the Silver Stream.

' Don't send Shine to cant an' snuffle, an' preach the poor woman into a fit o' the miserables,' he said.

Ephraim lifted his patient eyes to Rogers's face for a moment with an expression of meek reproof, then let them slide back to his boots again, but answered nothing. The enmity of the two was well known in Waddy. Rogers was a worldly man who drank and swore, and who loved a fight as other men loved a good meal ; and Shine, as the superintendent, must withhold his countenance from so grievous a sinner. Besides, there was a belief that at some time or another the faceman had thrashed Shine, who was searcher at the Stream in his week-day capacity, and for that reason was despised by the miners, and regarded as a creature apart. Ephraim, it was remarked, was always particularly careful in searching Rogers when he came off shift, in the hope, as the men believed, of one day finding a secreted nugget, and getting even with his enemy by gaoing him for a few years.

As Ephraim passed out from the bar he again allowed his eyes to roll up and meet those of his enemy from the dark shadow of his thick brows.

'Don't forget the little widow was sweet on Frank Hardy before you jugged him, Tinribs,' said the miner.

Tinribs was a name bestowed upon the superintendent by the youth of Waddy, and called after him by irreverent small boys from convenient cover or under the shelter of darkness. He found the Widow Haddon at home. She it was who answered his knock.

'I have come from the School Committee, ma'am,' he said, still intent upon his boots.

'About Dickie, is it? Come in.'

Mrs. Haddon was dressmaker-in-ordinary to the township, and her otherwise carefully tended kitchen was littered with sippings and bits of material. She resumed her task by the lamp as soon as the delegate of the School Committee was comfortably seated.

'Has Richard come home, ma'am?' Ephraim was an orator, and prided himself on his command of language, but his knowledge of English grammar was strictly limited.

The widow shook her head. 'No,' she said composedly. 'I don't think he will come home to-night.'

'We have had a committee meeting, missus,' said Ephraim, examining the toe of his left boot reproachfully, 'an' it's understood we got to catch these boys.'

'What!' cried Mrs. Haddon, dropping her work into her lap. 'You silly men are going to make a hunt of it? Then, let me tell you, you will not get that boy of mine to-morrow, nor this week, nor next. Was ever such a pack of fools! Let Dickie think he is being hunted, and he'll be a bushranger, or a brigand chief, or a pirate, or something desperately wicked in that amazin' head of his, and you won't get a-nigh him for weeks, not a man Jack of you! Dear, dear, dear, you men—a set of interferin', mutton-headed creatures!'

'He's an unregenerate youth—that boy of yours, ma'am.'

'Is he, indeed?' Mrs. Haddon's handsome face flushed, and she squared her trim little figure. 'Was he that when he went down the broken winze to poor Ben Holden? Was he that when he brought little Kitty Green and her pony out of the burnin' scrub? Was he all a little villain when he found you trapped in the cleft of a log under the mount there, when the Stream men wouldn't stir a foot to seek you?'

During this outburst Shine had twisted his boots in all directions, and examined them minutely from every point of view.

'No, no, ma'am,' he said, 'not all bad, not at all; but—ah, the—ah, influence of a father is missing, Mrs. Haddon.'

'That's my boy's misfortune, Mr. Superintendent.'

'It—it might be removed.'

'Eh? What's that you say?'

The widow eyed her visitor sharply, but he was squirming over his unfortunate feet, and apparently suffering untold agonies on their account.

'The schoolmaster must be supported, missus,' he said hastily. 'Discipline, you know. Boys have to be mastered.'

'To be sure; but you men, you don't know how. My Dick is the best boy in the school, sometimes.'

'Sometimes, ma'am, yes.'

'Yes, sometimes, and would be always if you men had a pen'orth of ideas. Boys should be driven sometimes and sometimes coaxed.'

'And how'd you coax him what played wag under the very school, fought there, an' then broke out of the place like a burgerler?'

'I know, I know—that's bad; but it's been a fearful tryin' day, an' allowances should be made.'

'Then, if he comes home you'll give him over to be—ah, dealt with?'

'Certainly, superintendent; I am not a fool, an' I want my boy taught. But don't you men go chasin' those lads; they'll just enjoy it, an' you'll do no good. You leave Dickie to me, an' I'll have him home here in two shakes. Dickie's a high-spirited boy, an' full o' the wild fancies of boys. He's done this sort o' thing before. Run away from home once to be a sailor, an' slep' for two nights in a windy old tree not a hundred yards from his own comfortable bed, imaginin' he was what he called on the foretop a somethin'. But I know well enough how to work on his feelings.'

'A father, ma'am, would be the savin' o' that lad.'

Mrs. Haddon dropped her work again and her dark eyes snapped; but Ephraim Shine had lifted one boot on to his knee, and was examining a hole in the sole with bird-like curiosity.

'When I think my boy needs special savin' I'll send for you, Mr. Shine—p'raps.'

'It'd be a grave responsibility, a trial an' a constant tribulation, but I offer myself. I'll be a father to your boy, ma'am, barrin' objections.'

'An' what is meant by that, Mr. Shine ?'

The widow, flushed of face, with her work thrust forward in her lap and a steely light in her fine eyes, regarded the searcher steadily.

'An offer of marriage to yourself is meant, Mrs. Haddon, ma'am.'

Shine's eyes came sliding up under his brows till they encountered those of Mrs. Haddon ; then they fell again suddenly. The little widow tapped the table impressively with her thimbled finger, and her breast heaved.

'Do you remember Frank Hardy, Ephraim Shine ?'

'To be certain I do.'

'Well, man, you may have heard what Frank Hardy was to me before he went to—to—'

'To gaol, Mrs. Haddon ? Yes.'

'Listen to this, then. What Frank Hardy was to me before he is still, only more dear, an' I'd as lief everybody in Waddy knew it.'

'A gaol-bird an' a thief he is.'

'He is in gaol, an' that may make a gaol-bird of him, but he is no thief. 'Twas you got him into gaol, an' now you dare do this.'

Shine's slate-coloured eyes slid up and fell again.

'Twas done in the way o' duty. He don't deny I found the gold on him.'

'No, but he denies ever havin' seen it in his life before, an' I believe him.'

'An' about that cunnin' little trap in his boot-heel, ma'am ?'

'It was what he said it was—the trick of some enemy.'

Mr. Shine lifted his right boot as if trying its weight, groaned and set it down again, tried the other, and said :

'An' who might the enemy ha' been, d'ye think ?'

'I do not know, but—I am Frank Hardy's friend, and you may not abuse him in my house.'

'You have a chance o' a respectable man, missus.'

Mrs. Haddon had risen from her seat and was standing over her visitor, a buxom black-gowned little fury.

'An' I tell him to go about his business, an' that's the way.' The gesture the widow threw at her humble kitchen door was magnificent. 'But stay,' she cried, although the imperturbable Shine had not shown the slightest intention of moving. 'You've heard I went with Frank's mother to visit him in the gaol there at the city ; p'raps you're curious to know what I said. Well,

I'll tell you, an' you can tell all Waddy from yon platform in the chapel nex' Sunday, if you like. "Frank," I said, "you asked me to be your wife, an' I haven't answered. I do now. I'll meet you at the prison door when you come out, if you please, an' I'll marry you straight away." Those were my very words, Mr. Superintendent, an' I mean to keep to them.'

Mrs. Haddon stood with flaming face and throbbing bosom, a tragedy queen in miniature, suffused with honest emotion. Ephraim sat apparently absorbed in his left boot, thrusting his finger into the hole in the sole, as if probing a wound.

'You wouldn't think, ma'am,' he said presently with the air of a martyr, 'that I gave fourteen-and-six for them pair o' boots not nine weeks since.'

Mrs. Haddon turned away with an impatient gesture.

'If you've said all you have to say, you might let me get on with my work.'

'I think that's all, Mrs. Haddon.' The searcher arose, and stood for a moment turning up the toe of one boot and then the other; he seemed to be calculating his losses on the bargain. 'You hand over the boy Richard, I understand, ma'am?'

'I'll do what is right, Mr. Shine.'

'The Committee said as much. The Committee has great respect for you, Mrs. Haddon.'

Ephraim lifted his feet with an effort, and carried them slowly from the house, carefully and quietly closing the kitchen door after him. About half a minute later he opened the door again, just as carefully and as quietly, and said :

'Good night, ma'am, and God bless you.'

Then he went away, his hands bunched behind him, and walking like a man carrying a heavy burden.

CHAPTER IV.

DICK HADDON and Ted McKnight were still at large next morning, and nothing was heard of them till two o'clock in the afternoon, when Wilson's man, Jim Peetree, reported having discovered the boys swimming in the big quarry in the old Red Hand paddock. Jim, seeing a prospect of covering himself with glory, made a dash after the truants; but they snatched up their clothes and ran for the saplings up the creek, all naked as they were, and

Jim was soon out of the hunt, but he captured Ted's shirt, and produced it as a guarantee of good faith.

That night three boys—three of the faithful—Jacker McKnight, Phil Doon, and Billy Peterson, stole through Wilson's paddock carrying mysterious bundles, and taking as many precautions to avoid observation and pursuit as if they were really, as they pretended to be with the fine imagination of early boyhood, desperate characters bent upon an undertaking of unparalleled lawlessness and great daring. They crossed the creek and crept along in the shadow of the hill, for the moon, although low down in the sky, was still bright and dangerous to hunted outlaws. Off to the left could be heard the long-drawn respirations of the engines at the Silver Stream, and the grind of her puddlers, the splashing of the slurry, and the occasional solemn significant clang of a knocker. They passed the old Red Hand shaft, long since deserted and denuded of poppet legs and engine-houses, its comparatively ancient tips almost overgrown and characterless, and lusty young gums flourishing amongst its scattered boulders. Waddy venerated the old Red Hand as something so ancient that its history left openings for untrammeled conjecture, and the boys associated it with not a few of the mysteries of those grand far-off ages when dragons abducted beautiful maidens and giants were quite common outside circuses. The mouth of the shaft was covered with substantial timbers, save for a small iron-barred door securely padlocked. The pit now served a useful purpose as air-shaft for the Silver Stream, and the iron-runged ladders still ran down into its black depths.

The boys kept to the timber, and presently found themselves climbing down the rugged rocks where the hillside suddenly became an abrupt wall. From here had been blasted the thousands of tons of rock that went to the building of that grim prison in Yarraman, the town where Frank Hardy lay, a good half-day's tramp across the wide flat country faced by the township. The quarry, too, was overgrown again ; being almost inaccessible to Wilson's cattle its undergrowth was rank and high, and as it was sheltered from the sun's rays and watered in part by a tiny spring, it was often the one green oasis in a weary land of crackling yellow and drab.

After gaining the bottom of the quarry, Jacker led the way to the deepest end. Here the bottom, covered with scrub growth, sloped rather suddenly for a few feet up to the abrupt wall. Going on his hands and knees under the thick odorous pepper-

mint saplings, Jacker ran his head into a niche in the rock amongst climbing sarsaparilla, and remained so, like some strange geological specimen half embedded in the rock. Within, where his head was hidden, the darkness was impenetrable. Jacker blew a strange note on a whistle manufactured from the nut of an apricot, and after a few moments a light appeared below him, a feeble flame, far down in the rock. This was waved twice and then withdrawn.

'Righto!' said Jacker in a hoarse piratical tone. 'Gimme the tucker, Black Douglas; I'll go down. You coves keep watch, an' no talkin', mind.'

Phil grumbled inarticulately, and Jacker's tone became hoarser and more piratical still.

'Who's commandin' here?' he growled. 'D'ye mean mutiny?'

'Oh, shut up!' said Doon, bitterly. 'No one's goin' t' mutiny, but there ain't no fun campin' here.'

McKnight relented.

'All right,' he said, 'come down if you wanter. S'pose you'll on'y be makin' some kind of a row 'f I leave you.'

Jacker put the growth aside carefully, and going feet first gradually disappeared. Within there in the formless darkness he stood upon a ladder made of the long stem of a sapling to which cleats were nailed. The sapling was suspended in a black abyss. The boy, with his bundle hanging from his shoulder, started down fearlessly. Presently he came to where a second prop was fastened to the first with spikes and strong rope. Here he paused a moment, and called :

'Hello, be-e-low there!'

Jacker's character had undergone a rapid change ; he was now quite an innocent and law-abiding person, a working shareholder in the Mount of Gold Quartz-mining Company.

'On top!' answered a cautious voice from the depths.

'Look up—man on!'

And now, having observed the formalities, Jacker continued his descent, and in a few moments dropped from the primitive ladder and found a footing on a few planks thrown from one drive to another, across what was really an old shaft. At his back was a drive running into darkness ; before him was a small irregular excavation lit with a single candle, and sitting in this, dressed, or, more correctly, undressed, like miners at their work, were Dick Haddon and Ted McKnight.

Jacker threw his bundle on the floor of the drive.

'Crib,' he said carelessly ; and then, after examining the face of the excavation : 'S'pose we ain't likely to cut the lode this shift, Dick ?'

Dick shook his head thoughtfully.

'No,' he said. 'Allowin' for the underlay, we should strike her about fifteen feet in.'

The other boys had now joined their mates. Each on his way down had gravely followed the example of Jacker, who was supposed to be the boss of the incoming shift. As the fathers labour their sons play, and for months these boys had been digging in this old mine, off and on, and with entralling mystery. The excavation in which Dick and Ted were seated represented the joint labour of the members of the Mount of Gold Quartz-mining Company, though the very existence of the mine was unknown to a single soul outside the juvenile syndicate.

On the surface all signs of the shaft had long since been obliterated. The quarrymen blasting into the side of the hill years back had made a small opening into the disused pit at some distance from the top, and this opening was accidentally discovered by Dick and Jacker one day during a hunt for a wounded rabbit. Investigation proved the mine to be of no great depth, and, thanks to the pumps of the Silver Stream, as dry as a bone. A company of reliable small boys was formed with exceeding caution and a fine observance of rule and precedent ; for Dick Haddon did nothing by halves, and forgot nothing that might give an air of reality to the creations of his exuberant fancy.

The original intention of the Mount of Gold Quartz-mining Company was to strike a reef five yards wide, composed entirely of gold, and to overwhelm its various parents with contrition on account of past lambastings by making them suddenly rich beyond the dreams of Oriental avarice. Time had served to dim the ardour of its hopes in this direction, however, but the mine was still an enticing enterprise when exciting novelties in the way of adventure were wanting, and it would always be a hiding-place in which a youthful fugitive from injustice might defy all authority so long as the members of the Company remained true to their oath. Now that oath was quite the most solemn and impressive thing of the kind that Dick Haddon and Phil Doon had been able to discover after writing to the highest literary authorities.

The quarrel between Dick and Jacker McKnight that originated under the school was quite forgotten in the resulting excitement. It was a mere incident in any case, and would have

made no material difference in their friendship. It had not kept Jacker from visiting the Mount of Gold on the same night with information and supplies, and now the boy was cheerfully unconscious of the black eye that still ornamented his broad visage. There were two well-worn shovels and a miner's pick in the drive. Jacker seized the pick.

'Might as well put in a bit of work,' he said.

'Hold hard,' replied Dick, 'Smoke-ho, ole man. What's goin' on on top?'

'Whips! They had a meetin' about youse last night—Jo, an' Rogers, an' my dad, an' ole Tinrubs, an' the rest. They're all after you. You're fairly in fer it.'

Dick's face became radiant with magnificent ideas.

'What! You don't mean they're goin' t' form a band t' capture us?'

'Well, they sorter agreed about somethin' like that.'

'My word, that's into our hands, ain't it? Lemme see, we must be a band of bushrangers what's robbed the gold escort an' the mounted plice're huntin' us in the ranges. I'll be—yes, I'll be Morgan. An' Ted—! What'll we make Ted? I know—I know. He'll be my faithful black boy, what'll rather die than leave me. You fellers bring a cork to-morrow, an' we'll pretty quick make a faithful black boy of Twitter.'

All eyes were turned upon Ted, who did not seem in the least impressed by the magnificent prospect. Indeed, the faithful native was palpably out of sorts; he took no part in the enthusiasm of his mates, his face was pale, and funk was legible in the diffident eye he turned upon the company. Dick noted this and put in an artful touch or two.

'Jacky-Jacky, the faithful black boy,' he said; 'brave as a lion, an' the best shot in the world—better'n me!'

The ruse was not successful. Ted failed to respond.

'Twitter don't seem to want to be no black boy,' said Phil.

'I'll be Jacky-Jacky,' volunteered Peterson eagerly. Peterson was a stolid youth with a face like a wooden doll; absolutely reliable since he was as stubborn under adult rule as a whole team of unbroken bullocks, and quite reckless of consequences for the reason that he never anticipated them. Peterson would have made a most successful Jacky-Jacky, but his suggestion was overlooked in the general concern inspired by Ted's conduct.

Feeling the eyes of the party upon him, Ted grew more

uneasy, the corners of his mouth drew down, one finger went up slowly, and Twitter began to snivel.

'I—I—w—wa—want to go home,' he said.

The mates looked at each other in amazement. Ted was little, but his pluck had been tried on many occasions, and this was a great surprise.

'Well, he's on'y a kiddy,' said Phil pityingly, and with the superiority two years may confer.

Dick found the three were looking to him for an explanation.

'Ted's real scared,' he said. 'We made a discovery this afternoon—in there.'

'In the big drive?' asked Jacker. The others looked startled.

Dick nodded, and took up the candle. 'Come an' see,' he said.

Dick led the way along the opposite drive, and his mates followed, not too eagerly, Ted bringing up the rear. The drive was about eighty feet in extent. Having reached the end, Dick held the candle low, and made visible to his wondering mates a black cavity about eighteen inches in diameter in one corner near the floor.

'We were workin' in here a bit for a change this afternoon after Peetree hunted us, an' I broke through.'

'What's in there?' asked Jacker in an awed voice.

'Look,' said Dick.

Jacker backed away; the other three kept a respectful distance and stared silently.

'It's on'y another drive,' Dick explained. 'It must come from the Red Hand, I think.'

Dick was quite undisturbed, but the others were afraid, and even when they had returned to their own drive cast many doubting glances back into the darkness. In the mine as they had known it before everything was definite, and there was nothing of which a boy of spirit need be afraid. The shaft was choked with dirt a few feet below their landing-planks, and there was no spot in which a mystery might lurk; but it was very different now with that black hole leading Heaven knew into what awesome depths, harbouring goodness knew what horrors. Ted's defection had suddenly become the sentiment of the majority. At that moment Dick could have counted on Peterson alone had need arisen.

'We'll go down there an' explore them workin's,' said Dick, having lit a piece of dry root and composed himself for a smoke.

'In the daytime, Morgan,' said Jacker hastily and with diffidence.

'All right; but it don't make no difference down here, you know.'

Jacker thought it did, for although it was always night in the drives, the consciousness that the earth above was flooded with sunlight was a great heartener.

'Don't you think you'd best give this up for once—this bush-ranger game?' ventured Jacker.

'Why?' Dick's eyes were round with surprise.

'Oh, well, Twitter's jack of it, an' I don't think it's much fun.' Jacker had assumed a careless air. 'See here, Dick,' he continued smartly, 'the Cow Flat chaps made a raid last night, an' took Butts an' three others—mine among 'em.'

This was an important matter. Butts was Dick's big grey billygoat, the best goat in harness the boys had ever known or ever heard of, and the 'Cow Flat chaps' were the boys of a small centre about two miles and a half further down the creek, between whom and the boys of Waddy there existed an interminable feud that led them to fight on sight, and steal such of each other's possessions as could be easily and expeditiously removed. Dick's excitement soon evaporated; evidently root smoking was conducive to a philosophical frame of mind.

'We'll get them back all right—after,' he said.

'They'll work Butts to a shadder,' Jacker remarked insinuatingly.

'Then we'll go down some night, an' strip Amson's garden.' Amson was a prominent resident of Cow Flat, and had nothing whatever to do with the goat raid, but the boyish sense of justice does not stoop to find distinctions.

Jacker Mack had another string to his bow. 'They say Harry Hardy's comin' home this week,' he said.

'No!' cried Dick, much moved. 'Who says?'

'Gable says.'

'Pooh! Gable's a kid.'

'No matter, it's true. Mrs. Hardy had a letter 'n Harry's coming down with cattle.'

'Gosh! he'll make it hot for Tinribs, I bet.'

Waddy had been waiting for Harry Hardy to come home, confident that he would do something of an exciting character to the disadvantage of those persons who had been instrumental in sending his brother Frank to gaol. Harry was much the younger of the two brothers; for some years he had been away droving, and the news of his brother's misfortune was bringing him home from a Queensland station. The township thought, too, there

would be a score to wipe out on his mother's account, and the return was looked for as an important public event.

Dick pondered over the situation for a moment. It would never do to miss any entertainment that might result from Harry's return, and yet there was Joel Ham still to be reckoned with.

'I think we'd better wait,' he said. 'You fellows can let on as soon's he arrives.'

Ted's face fell again, and Jacker moved uneasily. He was anxious to be out of the mine and away from the uncanny possibilities of that dark chasm, and yet it was absolutely necessary that he should show no sign of funk, leave no opening for the tongue of derision. Some day, perhaps, when the full strength of the company was available and candles were numerous, he would follow Dick's lead in the work of exploration, but for the present his whole desire was to get to the surface. Now recollection came, and with it hope. Diving into his breast pocket, he drew forth a soiled and crumpled envelope, and handed it to Dick.

'A letter,' he said, 'from your mother.'

Dick was surprised; as he took the note Jacker discovered an accusation in his eye.

'The oath don't say nothin' agin' letters,' said McKnight sullenly.

'No,' answered his mate, 'but really miners ain't supposed to have mothers runnin' after 'em, like if they were kids.'

'Well,' said Jacker Mack on the defensive, 'your mother comes to me at dinner time, an' she says: "I s'pose 'taint likely you'll see my Dick, Jacker." I said, "No, Missus Haddon, 'taint, s'elp me." Then she says, "Well, if he should come to see you, will you give him this?" So I took it, an' there you are.'

Dick read the letter slowly; it was a very artful letter, most pathetic, and sprinkled with drops which might have been tears. The writer spoke despondingly of her loneliness and her desolation, and the fears she endured when by herself in the house at night, knowing there was a camp of blacks in the corner paddock, and that there were so many rough cattlemen about. She was entirely helpless since her only protector had deserted her, and she supposed that it only remained for her to be resigned to her fate. She signed herself, 'Your forsaken and sorrow-stricken mother.'

When Dick had finished reading he started to put on his clothes.

'What's up, Morgan?' asked Phil.

'Knock off!' was the brief reply.

'But what yer goin' to do?'

'I'm goin' home.'

'Home!' cried Peterson. 'Why?'

'Because!'

Dick had the instincts of a leader; he demanded reasons for everything, but gave none,

Before the lads parted that night young Haddon proffered Ted McKnight excellent advice.

'Your dad's night shift, ain't he?' he said. 'Well, don't you go in till near twelve. He'll be gone to work then, an' when he comes off in the mornin' he'll be too tired to lick you much.' This, from an orphan with practically no experience of paternal rule, argued a fine intuition.

(*To be continued.*)

At the Sign of the Ship.

SOME remarks of mine, hasty perhaps, to the effect that literature cannot be taught, have brought on me the censures of Mr. Beeching. I was not aware that Mr. Beeching himself lectures, or has lectured, for the Oxford School of English Literature. As this has been his fortune, he must know much more about the subject than I do. I have only heard disparaging things said about the School, by young persons who thought it about the worst of schools wherein to invest their time and industry. Mr. Beeching says that he for one has not made literary history or philology the staple of his discourse. I would gladly sit under him, were it possible, and in any case I admire his originality, for surely the Examination Papers deal with philology and literary history? On these matters questions can be set, and marks can be awarded, but neither literary history nor etymology is literature. How is literature to be taught? one asks. 'We don't learn Shakespeare; we learn Clarendon Press notes,' was the gloomy report recently conveyed to me from a pupil in English literature. I cannot give up the name of my informant, who at all events was not 'a boy making ready to present himself for the Universities' certificate in English,' as Mr. Beeching suggests. No conjecture could be more remote from the mark.

* * *

What do the Clarendon Press editions of Shakespeare's plays exist for? For teaching literature, I presume. I shall say no more about them than this: borrow a sample, read the notes, and remember that the young are obliged to study this kind of thing for examinations in literature. Methinks these notes 'have naught to do with Dionysus.' I infer that, not being able to teach literature, some mortals, though not Mr. Beeching, teach Clarendon Press notes. However, I shall act fairly. I shall

procure specimens of the papers set at Oxford, and (not having seen any of them yet) I shall either confess that literature can be taught at Oxford, or remain wedded to the opinion that it cannot.

* * *

Mr. Beeching asserts that 'teaching literature' does not mean 'teaching the art of making literature.' I fancied that it could not, because the literature made in the age before the teaching of literature seems, on the whole, at least as good as the literature of to-day. But perhaps, if the Oxford School of Literature lasts a hundred years, we shall have much better writers than the Elizabethans or any of the old untaught geniuses. Mr. Beeching quotes me as saying 'a man is born to appreciate literature or to detest it.' I ought not to have said 'detest.' Between those who detest and those who appreciate literature there are the indifferent. Can they be taught appreciation? Mr. Beeching uses the analogy of mathematics. There are born mathematicians, such as Pascal, and born dolts, like Macaulay, Sir William Hamilton, and (to compare small things with great) myself. But many persons who are not Pascals or Newtons can be taught more or less of mathematics. The question is, Does the analogy with teaching literature hold water? Can the indifferents be taught to appreciate literature? Well, certainly I have observed many patients who had not been taught successfully. They hated Shakespeare and Chaucer more after being taught literature than they had hated them before they were taught. They could not know less of Shakespeare and Chaucer than they did before, but indifference had become active malice. Has Mr. Beeching never remarked this circumstance?

* * *

I admit that they may have been taught in the wrong way: fed on Clarendon Press notes, for example. There may be a more excellent way in which Mr. Beeching walks with his flock. I am delighted to believe that this is so; for indeed I wish that literature could be taught. Mr. Beeching says 'That there is a very large body of people with some taste for letters, but very badly in need of teaching, is shown by the popularity of certain novelists whom people whose taste has had more training find intolerable.' He is ungallant enough to name a lady novelist. I shall not follow him, but shall take an 'A B case.' A and B are atrocious writers of great popularity. Well, but if people admire *them*, it does not prove that these people have an untrained 'taste for

letters,' as Mr. Beeching argues. It proves the reverse; namely, that these people have a congenital lack of taste, a frightful minus quantity. Surely, if one's taste had never been 'trained,' one would still keep a lively aversion for the novels of A and B. I am not referring to anybody in particular as A and B. My own taste (trained as far as reading many good books is training) inclines me to enjoy the novels of C and D. Yet my cultivated friends shudder at C and D. They regard me as a pariah because I enjoy C and D. Thus, at least in my case, training has been wasted, or else there is nothing in training. One has met persons of profoundly serious training who could not read Scott and Dickens. Whether this was the result of training or of native nobility of genius I do not know. But the same people could read dreadfully stupid trash, as long as it was obscure and affected. Whether training gave this power, or whether the persons in question were merely pompous and affected, I am unable to decide. But as to the readers of A and B Mr. Beeching says, 'If they had been taught, like Mr. Lang and Mr. Collins, in the Oxford school of Literæ Humaniores, they would know better than to pin their faith where they do.' Now really this is cruel. Does Mr. Beeching suppose that when Mr. Collins and I see a dean, a stock-broker, or a lady deep in a novel of A or B we say, 'But for the grace of the school of Literæ Humaniores, there goes Collins or Lang'? Why, if we had been educated at Dotheboys Hall, we should still dislike the novels of A and B.

* * *

Mr. Beeching mentions certain Oxford Dons, some of them my own friends, who imparted literary training. Well, Mr. Jowett told me, as an undergraduate, not to imitate Mr. Carlyle. I could only say that it was catching, and it is. So is Thackeray. I wish I could have caught more of his complaint. Mr. Jowett also remarked, 'Don't write as if you were writing for a penny paper;' 'a prediction, cruel smart.' That kind of training can be given successfully or unsuccessfully. You can be told not to write like the author whom an essayist in *The Cornhill* frequently cites as 'Pennialinus.' To these lengths I can go with Mr. Beeching. Mr. Henry Butcher was never my tutor, but Mr. Beeching names him in this connection; and certainly to read his work on the Poetics is, in itself, a liberal education. But let Mr. Beeching consider: would the admirers of A and B be cured of their infatuation by a course of Mr. Butcher's admirable studies of the Greek

genius? I doubt it, and one thing is certain, the country would not stand an educational measure which made these studies compulsory. I am really anxious to agree with Mr. Beeching. I myself recently converted a very young lady who expressed an abhorrence for *Pickwick*. I induced her to give Mr. Pickwick a chance, and a salutary tract might be written on her affecting conversion. But she still protests that the Pickwickians drank too much. This was rather moral than æsthetic criticism. However, I withdraw my 'very injurious statement' that the teachers of English literature at Oxford don't care for literature, and don't believe it can be taught. I fear I 'damned them at a venture,' urged solely by the circumstance that the Clarendon Press publishes Shakespeare annotated to such a tune that the teaching of Shakespeare seemed to be matter of despair. My conscience pricks me! I once edited a play of Molière for the Clarendon Press. I dare say it was a dread example, though probably it did not sin by dragging in philology. I hope I did not expect it to teach appreciation of Molière. 'The instinct of the teacher,' says Mr. Beeching, is 'to put into his pupils' hands a plain text without notes.' Blessed be that instinct, and blessed the teachers whom it guides. But there are the Examiners to be reckoned with, and do they not expect the pupils to know the notes?

* * *

I have examined for an important examination in English Literature. My instinct was to evade the notes, but it was not easy. Almost all the young men unanimously declared that Sir Walter Scott approved of the French Revolution in its early stages. Somebody must have told them that, and all their teaching and training had not indicated to them the diverting character of the Crammer's statement.

* * *

The chief of my contention is that people are born with or without literary appreciation. Whenas I was a little boy Malory's *Morte Arthur* came in my way in a house where I was familiar. But it also came in the way of the Buttons or page of the establishment. We used to conceal the volumes for our private pleasure and, clearly, were both born with some amount of appreciation. But I then knew no other boy who ever looked at Malory. Whether the Buttons adopted a literary career or not is unknown, but he would never have delighted in A and B. Nobody could like both Malory and these popular authors. A

cook, a very plain cook, once made part of my humble establishment. *Her* line was Mr. Browning and Mr. Henry James. That woman could perhaps have been taught to cook (though I doubt it), but she did not need the school of Literæ Humaniores to teach her what, among other things, she ought to read. Again, all the annotated Brownings in the world could not have trained Mr. Edward Fitzgerald (of Omar Khayyam) to appreciate Browning. He simply could not 'thole' that poet. You may read his distressing remarks in the *Life of Tennyson*.

* * *

I have not been able to obtain in time papers set in the Oxford School of English Literature. But the following letter from the *Westminster Gazette* throws light on their character :—

'The Honour Schools at Oxford.'

'One who took the English School' writes to us respecting a paragraph with the above heading which we published the other day :

"Ten papers are set in this school. Of these, two are of general English literature—one on the period before, the other on that after 1700. In the former of these, three questions out of twelve last year dealt with Chaucer and his predecessors. One paper deals with Shakespeare, one with Milton, and the 'special subject' paper may be chosen from certain periods of English and foreign literatures, or it may be linguistic and philological. The Chaucer and Langland paper is half literary and half linguistic; *the other papers are all 'language papers,'* embracing historical grammar, philology, Old English, Gothic, &c. It is unfortunately true that few male undergraduates enter for this school—probably because there are no attractions in the way of scholarships, fellowships, &c. But the school is comparatively new, having only existed since 1896, and it must be remembered the History School began just as humbly and with less opposition from its own camp. Some people complain there is too much store set on philology, others that 'literature' is not sufficiently educative."

"However," adds our correspondent, "no one complains that the standard required is lower than that of the other schools, and most of us will agree that it is no more waste of time to become acquainted at first hand with the great writers of English literature than with those of classic times."

From the letter it appears that the sacred Muses take a second place in comparison with 'philology.' Moreover, there are 'few male undergraduates' who compete; and as there are no female undergraduates, for the University denies degrees to women, the school is mainly a ladies' school. I congratulate Mr. Beeching on his charming pupils—pleasanter they than 'male undergraduates' are, prettier at least.

Judging from a letter of Lord Grey's, also in the *Westminster Gazette*, Scotland is settling the Temperance Question. The miners in Fife and elsewhere buy public-houses, manage these themselves, and make profits, which they devote to securing the services of nurses and to building reading-rooms and laying down bowling-greens. These houses seem, in short, to be clubs, and most excellent institutions. Men will not get drunk at these places. Public opinion will be as much against it as in Pall Mall. Moreover, the liquors will be good of their kind. Most drunkenness comes of poisonous whisky and adulterated beer. These make a man mad, and he goes on drinking till he is, practically, poisoned. I have seen rural roads in Scotland littered with senseless men, 'intoxicated' in the literal sense of the word, rather than drunk. The miners will not buy these poisons, and will no more get drunk than an equal number of bishops would do. Meanwhile the profits go to excellent purposes. I presume that there is a law against selling poisonous beer and spirits. But certainly the law is not so administered as to reach the sinners, often very respectable people, who 'wad be nane the waur o' a hanging.'

It is not that a sober writer can recommend lynching. Some of the statistics of lynching are published by Miss Ida Wells Barnett in *The Independent* (New York). The affair is more serious than one had supposed. In 1896, 86 'coloured persons' were murdered by mob law; in 1897, 123; in the last five years, 504. Murder and rape are the crimes most frequently alleged. They naturally excite the wild justice of revenge; but what would they lose, in deterrent effect, if the law were allowed to take its course? There seems no reason to doubt that it would take its course. 'Bad reputation,' 'insults,' 'suspected robbery,' 'unpopularity,' are among the other offences capitally punished, and 'frightening child by shooting at rabbits.' Mere suspicion is a not infrequent ground of lynching. The most exasperating of

all crimes does not yield a very large proportion of cases. ‘The incentive was race-prejudice’ in many cases, says Miss Wells Barnett. She does not give the detailed statistics of white men lynched, which would be useful for comparison. The motive appears to be fear that the accused will not be found guilty on a fair trial, and this is an unpleasant condition of public sentiment. For a jury would not, probably, strain points in favour of negroes. One hundred and forty-seven whites were lynched in the five years, though none of them was rich or had powerful friends who might help to defeat justice. And this does look as if the mob liked to be their own hangmen: probably in outlying and ill-policed districts, like those in which ‘witches’ have practically been lynched in England not so long ago. But here the mob had the excuse that the law would not punish a witch who ‘overlooked’ sheep, cattle, and children. No American ‘lynchee,’ so to speak, seems to have suffered as a witch. Now, if we lynched, it is witches who in several rural districts would be the chief sufferers. If any American patriot wishes to retort on us, he might do worse than take this line. Superstition is not a motive in any American case. In England it would be a motive—if we lynched. But we don’t.

* * *

Mankind is greatly given to play the fool. Mr. Athol Forbes in *The Lady's Realm* describes ‘crystal gazing’ as practised in ‘Society.’ The crystal ball is kept in a box padded with ‘velvet leather.’ It is pawed by the idiot who wants to consult ‘the seer,’ ‘to place him *en rapport* with the crystal.’ The ball is then placed on ‘a lamen, as it is called.’ White, black, blue, violet, green, orange, and other gaudy clouds appear to the red and rolling eye of the visionary, with figures on the left, who are real, and figures on the right, who are symbolical. ‘If the clouds or shadows move from left to right, this means that spiritual beings are near.’ ‘The magnetism with which the surface of the mirror becomes charged collects there from the eyes of the gazer and from the universal ether.’ ‘The operator proceeds to magnetize the crystal by making passes with the right hand for about five minutes,’ and so forth.

* * *

All these absurdities (Mr. Forbes, of course, only describes them) may be perpetrated in ‘Society’—which means, here, among extremely ignorant and superstitious people. I have observed

scores of men and women who could see pictures in glass balls, or water, or ink, or a glass of sherry, or a ring stone; but there was no box, no 'lamen,' no nonsense about magnetism, no polychrome clouds, no 'spiritual beings,' no 'passes,' and no body 'temporarily mesmerised'—for, indeed, there is probably no such thing as 'mesmerism.' The 'operator' was taking tea, or smoking, or conversing cheerfully. There was no hocus-pocus; the 'operator' only looked at a glass ball, or a jug of water at luncheon, and described what he or she saw. There was no pretence of 'reading the future.' The gazer sometimes saw and described people, unknown to him or her, of whom somebody present was thinking; or events which were afterwards proved to have been occurring at a distance. This in itself is odd enough; but the pictures are usually fancy pictures or reminiscences. The rest is all nonsense. It is nonsense, too, to say that 'if you place a sovereign in the palm of your hand, and look steadily at it for about two minutes, the coin will play, or appear to play, strange tricks.' I have just tried the experiment for five minutes, and the coin did not appear to play any strange tricks. Perhaps other people may be luckier, but the phenomena are certainly not of universal occurrence. I once saw a professional who kept a crystal in a box, and went through various mummeries. I then gave him a ring, and he saw a middle-aged lady in mourning. The ring was a copy of a mediæval ring, like that worn by Joan of Arc. I said that the only woman in any way connected with the ring died at the early age of nineteen; and after that the seer did not even pretend to see anything, though the finest leads were offered him by a lady whose husband was at the front. The performer seemed honest, but very stupid and incompetent. He was rather a touching character: very poor (no fire on a bitter day), very neat, very full of mystic 'patter'; pretty obviously a sincere but misguided student of the occult. Even I could have made a better conjurer, and pretended to see mountains and marvels, so frank were the hints unconsciously offered for his guidance.

* * *

Mr. John Davidson's *Testament of a Vivisector* (Grant Richards) does not seem exactly the kind of apology which a vivisector would make for his profession. The topic is odious. Personally I would rather dree my weird, whatever it may be, than be cured at the expense of the vivisection of one dog or cat. However, that is only an individual preference, and 'those who

carve the living hound' probably hold that they confer, or in time may confer, a benefit on humanity. The Anglican is taunted by Mr. Davidson's not very sane vivisector with

His vested interests snug and ancient lights.

Surely not Anglicans alone derive benefit from the law about 'ancient lights.' It is just as much open to a Muggletonian or a Comtist. Before I knew what the phrase meant I saw 'Ancient Lights' boldly placarded on a building where structural changes were being made. I actually thought that the place was a tabernacle of 'Auld Lichts' who had taken to speaking English, and were carrying on the work near Leicester Square. Mr. Davidson addresses 'those who are not afraid to fathom what is subconscious in themselves or others.' I am not a bit afraid, but I don't think I have any subconsciousness. That possession seems peculiar to people of genius, Highland seers, and young ladies who can see pictures in glass balls. The vivisector argues that 'matter is unconscious will,' a perfectly safe assertion as long as nobody knows what matter is, or whether there is any matter at all—a point subject to doubt. Then we don't know what 'will' is or what 'unconscious' means, so the definition contains three *x*'s or unknown quantities. However, this unamiable philosopher, the metaphysical vivisector, deems himself

Lord of the riddle of the Universe.

Much good may it do him! His wife would not stay with him. His daughters left. He himself is far from being comfortable. Now in real life he would probably be a F.R.S. and enjoy a European reputation and an excellent cellar. One would not like him any the better. What Mr. Davidson's vivisector, if he be logical, will probably come to, may be read in *Les Morts Bizarres*, which nobody will be happier for reading. The philosopher in that gruesome book broke into a dentist's studio, got hold of the machine that plays 'buzz' inside your head, and therewith committed a lingering suicide. *C'était son idée à lui*. He wanted to know how much pain he could put up with; he did know, at his personal expense, and there was an end of him. But I do not think that Mr. Davidson's other 'testaments' are 'likely to offend both the religious and the irreligious mind'—at least, if they resemble this specimen. The chief end of man is useless knowledge, says the thinker, and the Shorter Catechism defines it otherwise, while the popular tendency is to make Greek non-com-

pulsory : a reaction against useless knowledge. Obviously man is heedless of his chief end, and given up to wallowing in technical education. But there is nothing in what the vivisector says to outrage both religious and irreligious minds. He is too obviously a thinker whose ideas carry no practical weight. Of course, only an extremely dull critic would think that the vivisector expresses the ideas of the poet himself. He is only one character in what will doubtless be an interesting series of 'men and women,' admirably printed and only costing sixpence.

* * *

The vivisector believes that to pull a rose 'gives matter pain.' Perhaps ; and perhaps the plant to which Mr. Darwin played the trombone felt a lively pleasure, but, like Ole Brer Rabbit, it 'kept on a-saying nothing.' If trout could yell when hooked, we would not fish ; but I deem, for reasons, that their mouths are the reverse of sensitive. However, this anecdote was told to me by two ladies. They were fishing, for the first time, in a boat on a loch. One of them hooked and brought into the boat a fish of unknown species. It uttered yells of pain. While one of the ladies ran about the boat, shrieking for assistance and advice, the other sat down with her back to the fish, and with her fingers in her ears. To take the fish off the hook might have provoked it to wilder laments. If all fish behaved in this way (and, for all that my friends knew, they do) nobody would follow the profession of St. Peter. But I cannot hold, with the vivisector, that the heavenly bodies perhaps

Are whirling there
In agony unutterable.

Luckily it is inaudible, though 'the whole creation groaneth ;' so the vivisector might quote Holy Writ, after all, in favour of his hypothesis.

ANDREW LANG.

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